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2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

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People and places in the news

FACE TO FACE

JADON SANCHO

Interview with the planet's hottest young talent

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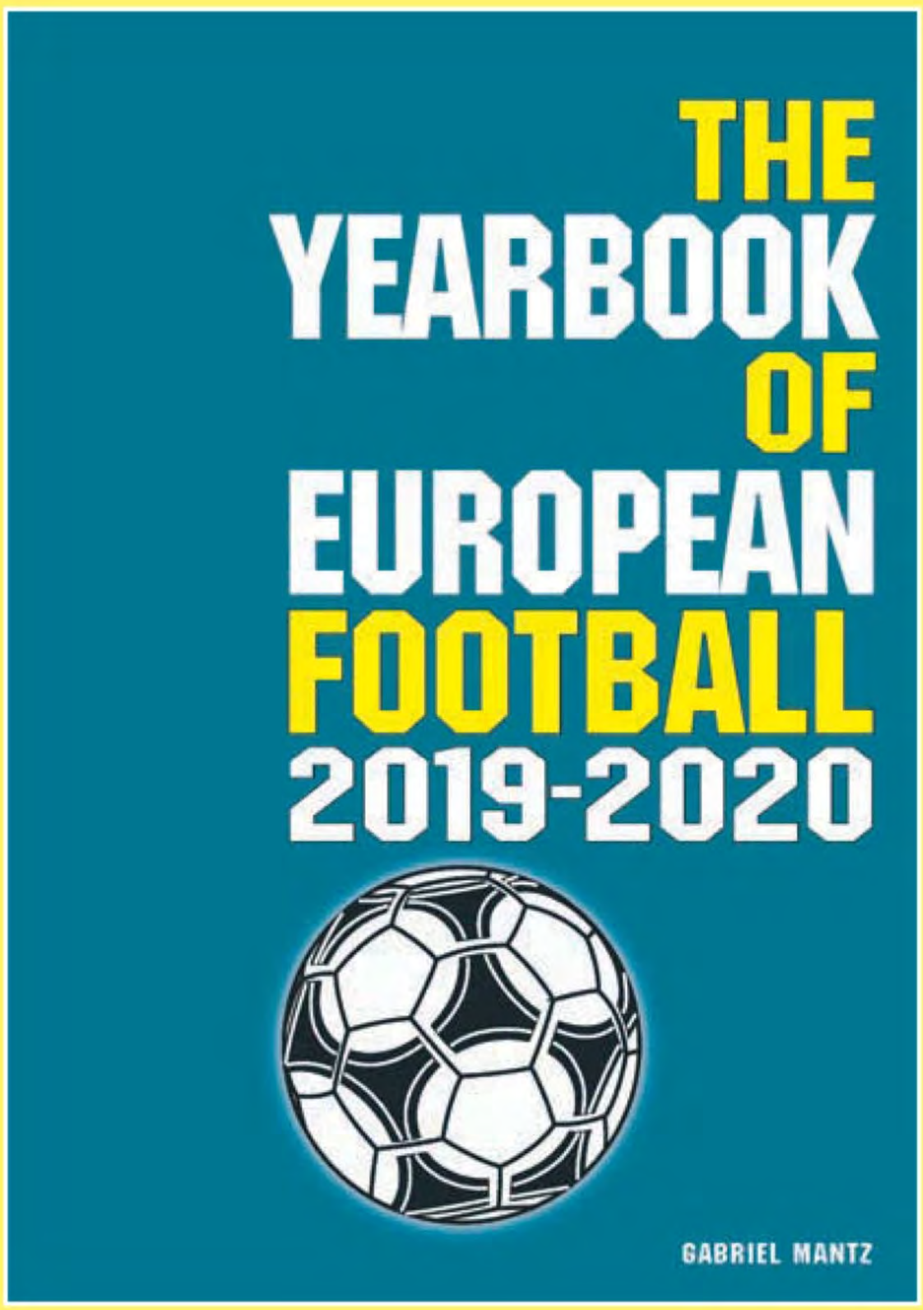

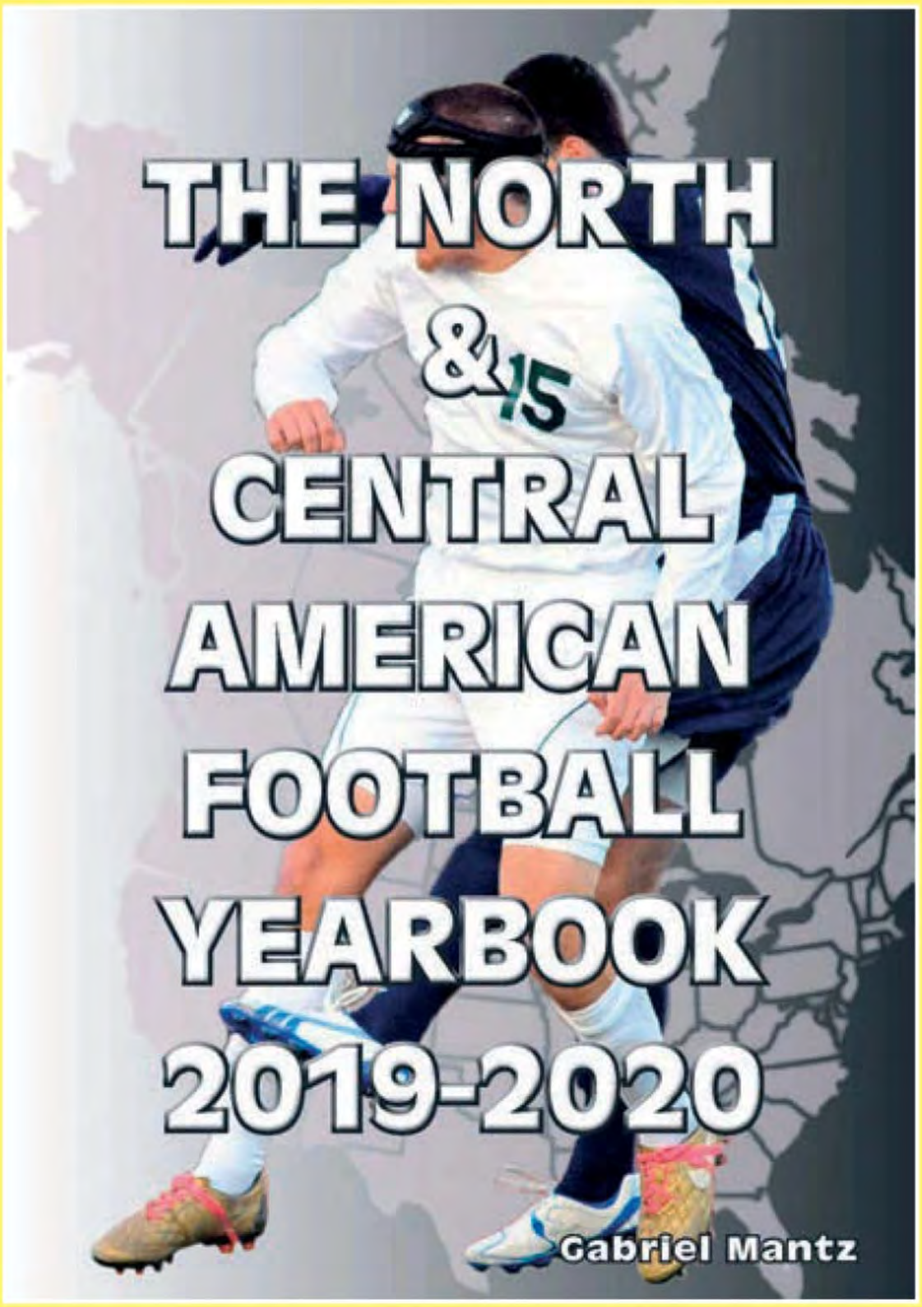

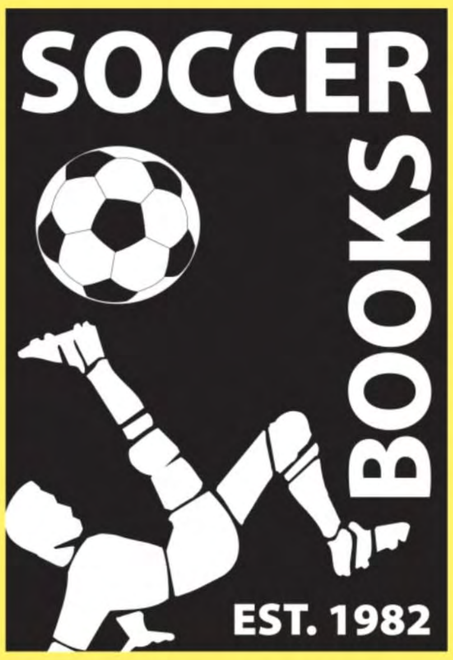

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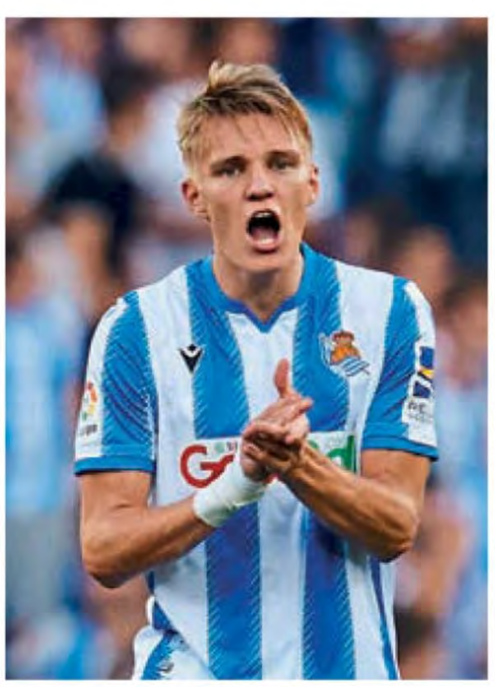

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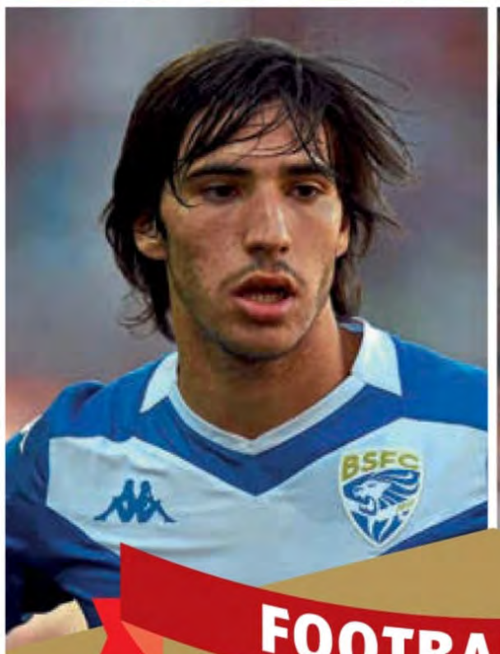
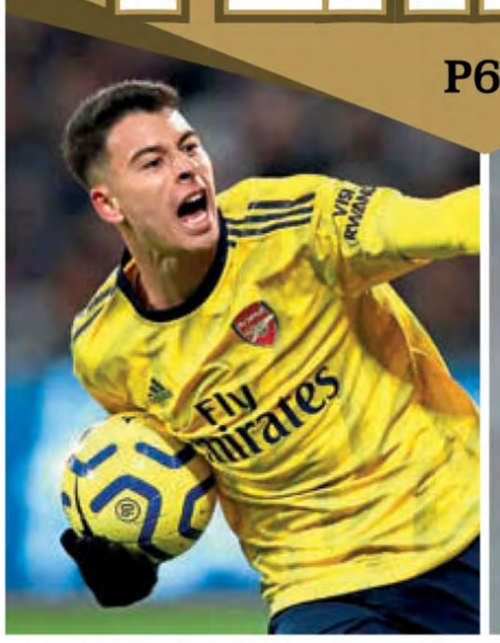
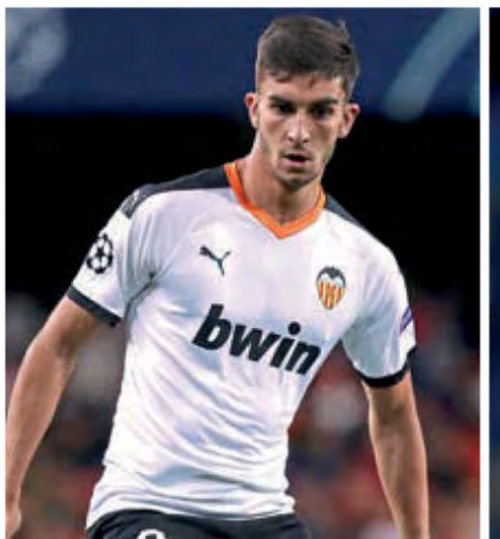


FOOTBALL RESET

100 PLAYERS

P61





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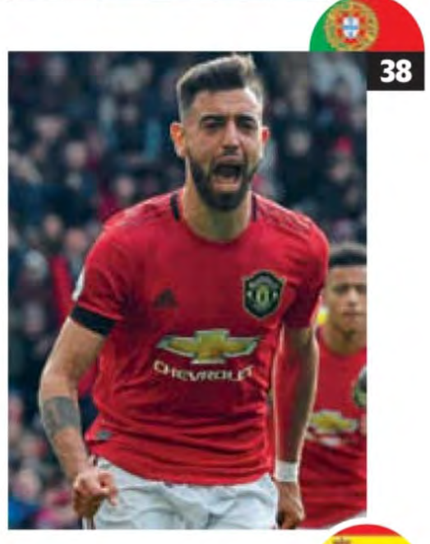

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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

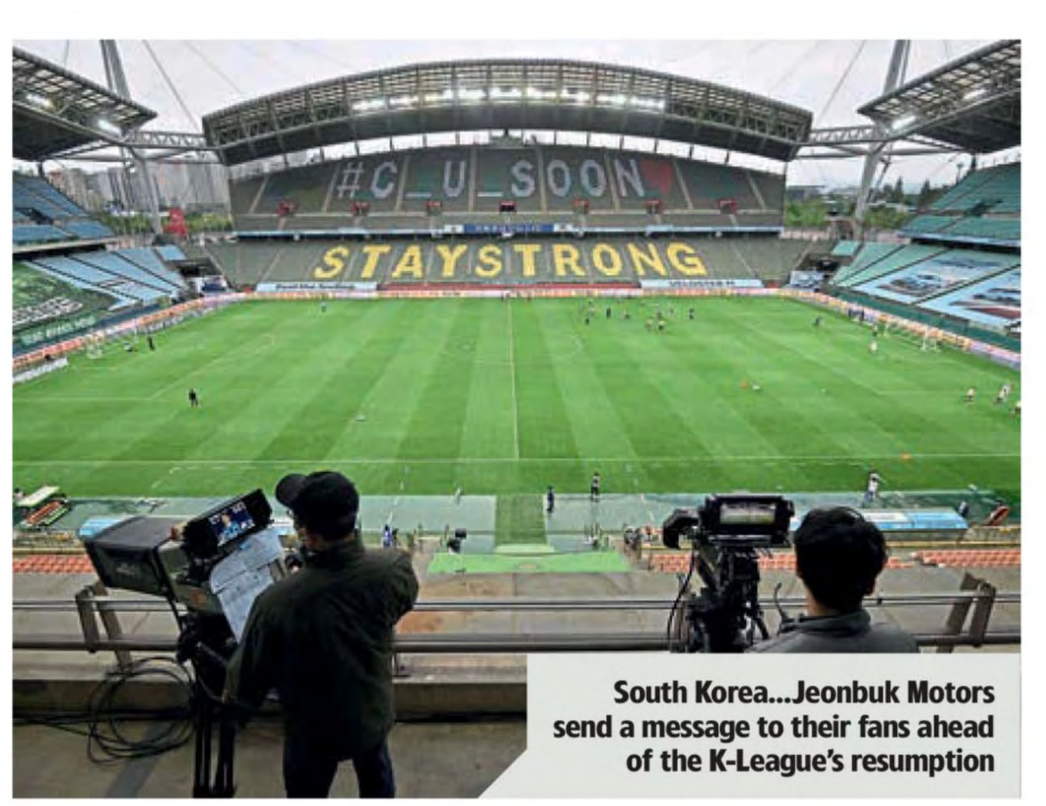
Black Lives Matter... Marcus Thuram takes a knee after scoring for Borussia Monchengladbach

H-Hotels

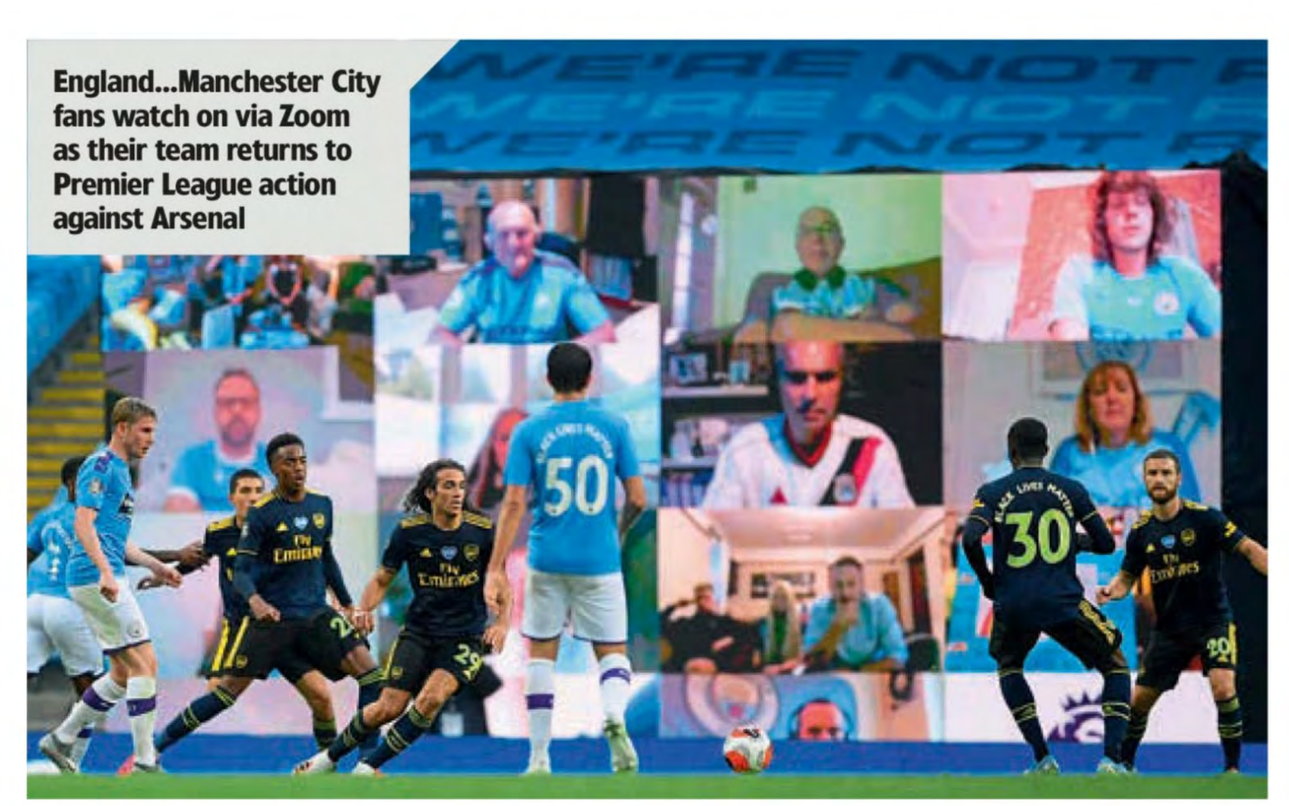
Austria...fans watch from their cars as RB Salzburg and Austria Lustenau contest the Austrian Cup Final

Argentina...friends and relatives pay respect to ex-Central Cordoba player Tomas "*El Trinche*" Carlovich at the Gabino Sosa stadium in Rosario

Italy...Napoli celebrate winning the Coppa Italia Final after beating Juventus on penalties



South Korea...Jeonbuk Motors send a message to their fans ahead of the K-League's resumption



England...Manchester City fans watch on via Zoom as their team returns to Premier League action against Arsenal

Switzerland...the Ottmar Hitzfeld Stadium in the Alpine village of Gspon, the highest stadium in Europe, will host the European Mountain Village Championship in August

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FROM THE EDITOR

It's the start of a new era, so I'd like to personally welcome you to the first issue of this prestigious magazine overseen by Kelsey Media's football hub. Ably assisted by *World Soccer* stalwart Nich Hills for the first couple of issues, we will ensure it continues to remain true to the principles that have made *World Soccer* an institution of football journalism for 60 years.

Our well-connected network of worldwide correspondents will continue to deliver the inside track from all corners of the globe, while Kelsey's new team of writers will complement that with their own hard-hitting stories, such as unearthing the planet's hottest new young talents – see Assistant Editor Jamie Evans' Young Brits Abroad (page 58).

World Soccer has built a reputation as the "bible" of the global game

The theme of "newness" permeates throughout this issue. From on the pitch – 100 players who will rejuvenate football after coronavirus (page 61) and remarkable new trends with home advantage seemingly eradicated in supporter-less stadiums (page 16), to off it – what the footballing landscape looks like post-COVID-19 (page 46) and Didier Drogba's bid to become the Ivorian Football Federation president (page 30).

Through articles such as these, and under the guidance and high standards set by previous editor Gavin Hamilton, *World Soccer* has built a reputation as the "bible" of the global game – and under my stewardship, I will ensure this continues to remain the case.

Stephen Fishlock, Group Editor

New Blue... Timo Werner

ENGLAND

Chelsea signing sits out Champions League

Timo Werner will miss the remainder of RB Leipzig's Champions League campaign after agreeing to join Chelsea at the conclusion of the Bundesliga season.

According to the striker's agent, former West Germany defender Karlheinz Forster, it was "the joint vote of all parties involved – and not just Timo's decision – that he should move to Chelsea on July 1 and not until mid or late August".

Having paid £54million to see off Liverpool in the race for the 24-year-old's signature, the Stamford Bridge club want Werner fully rested before next term gets underway.

"He will strengthen us," says Blues boss Frank Lampard. "He is a huge talent who had a fantastic season."

Werner will be part of a new-look front line at Stamford Bridge, alongside fellow new signing Hakim Ziyech, and replacing outbound Pedro, who will join Roma.

Leipzig, meanwhile, will discover who their quarter-final opponents will be after the remaining Champions League last-16 ties are played on August 7-8.

"At my best, I played better than Neymar. Messi and Neymar need to win the World Cup to be better than me. Cristiano Ronaldo is just strength; he strikes the ball well, but I'm more skilful"

Ex-Brazil forward Edilson declares that he was a better player than Messi, Ronaldo and Neymar

USA

Football returns to USA

With the MLS season on hold, football has returned to North America under the guise of a new competition, the MLS is Back Tournament.

The month-long competition kicked off on July 8 and features all 26 MLS clubs, with 16 teams advancing from six groups to the knockout stage, and the final taking place on August 11. The winner will be rewarded a place in next season's CONCACAF Champions League, while points accumulated during the competition will be counted towards the regular campaign when it eventually returns later this year, having been suspended after two matches in March.

With no fans allowed in attendance, every game will be played at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, located at Disney World, Orlando.

Returning...MLS

HEROES & VILLAINS

Giving back...Rashford has been a force for good

MARCUS RASHFORD

Rashford joined forces with *FareShare*, helping the charity to feed children who have been unable to access free meals while schools are closed, and caused a U-turn in UK government policy. He followed that by reaching out to an autistic teenager being bullied on social media, before taking on the role of "Celebrity Supply Teacher" on *CBeebies*. For his efforts, he was awarded the High Sheriff Special Recognition Award for services to Greater Manchester.

HARRY KANE

It's been an impressive couple of months for England strikers. Kane will sponsor the shirts of Leyton Orient next season in a deal that will financially support three charities, as well as the English League Two side. "I was born only a couple of miles from the stadium and I'm really happy to give back to the club that gave me my first professional start," explained the Tottenham striker.

Giving back... Kane played 18 games on loan at Leyton Orient in 2011

JADON SANCHO

A hat-trick in Borussia Dortmund's 6-1 win at Paderborn saw the 20-year-old become the first Englishman to score an overseas hat-trick in one of Europe's major leagues for 31 years, matching the feat of Brian Stein for Caen against Cannes in Ligue 1 in May 1989.

Out of Europe...Trabzonspor finished bottom of their group in this season's Europa League

TRABZONSPOR

Top of the Super Lig ahead of football restarting in Turkey, the club will not be allowed to play in Europe if they qualify next season after being handed a one-season ban for Financial Fair Play (FFP) breaches.

CEVHER TOKTAS

A former defender in the Turkish top flight with Hacettepe, the 32-year-old admitted to killing his five-year-old son, Kasim, who was being treated in hospital on suspicion of a COVID-19 infection, it is alleged. He handed himself in to the police and confessed to smothering the boy with a pillow. Kasim had been placed in isolation along with his father in a children's hospital.

FARID EL MELALI

Algerian international Farid El Melali was arrested after allegedly masturbating in the courtyard of the building where he lives in France, while looking into the ground-floor home of a neighbour. Charged with indecent exposure, the 23-year-old's lawyer said in his defence: "He wasn't targeting anyone and wasn't aggressive towards anyone."

HEIKO HERRLICH

Augsburg's coach missed the restart of the Bundesliga season after breaching quarantine rules by leaving the team's hotel to buy toothpaste. The game against Wolfsburg was due to be his first in charge after being appointed in March. Herrlich was able to resume training with the team after two negative test results.

Herrlich...error of judgement

"It doesn't matter what colour or race you are. What we've seen in the movement is for real and it's on a global spectrum. I don't see any reason why any players should be rejecting to take the knee"

Dwight Yorke lends his support to the Black Lives Matter movement on *beIN SPORTS'* Keys & Gray Show

Jude BELLINGHAM

(Birmingham City)

It has been widely known for some time that the teenager is playing his last season in the Championship, with Manchester United and Borussia Dortmund chasing his signature, but the German side are close to announcing that they have won the race.

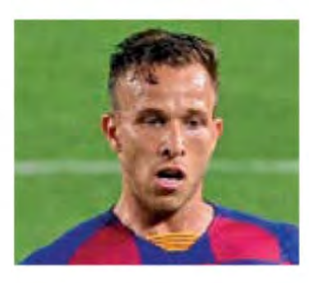
Having scored on his senior debut in August, becoming Birmingham's youngest debutant and goalscorer in the process, Bellingham only turned 17 in June. Yet, despite his tender years, the midfielder has handled the physicality of England's second tier with ease, and been utilised in a variety of positions.

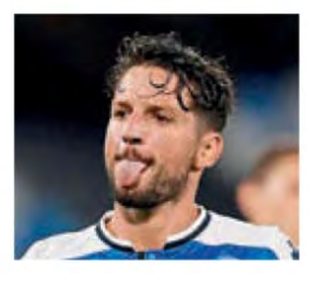
The transfer, which is likely to be worth in excess of £25million, will see him link up at Dortmund with fellow Englishman Jadon Sancho, whose progress in the Bundesliga has given Bellingham encouragement that he will be given more first-team opportunities at the Westfalenstadion than Old Trafford.

ARJEN ROBBEN
(Groningen)
The legendary winger will resume his career with boyhood club Groningen, a year after retiring.

ARTHUR
(Juventus)
One of the year's most intriguing transfer stories, the Brazilian will join Juventus in a deal worth €70m, with Miralem Pjanic, valued at €60m, moving the other way.

DRIES MERTENS
(Napoli)
Overtook Marek Hamsik as Napoli's record scorer with 122 goals when finding the net in the Coppa Italia semi-finals.



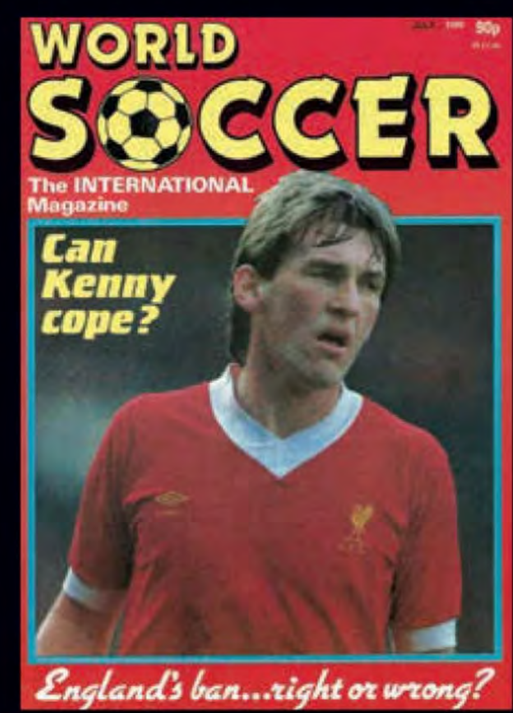


ANDREJ KRAMARIC
(Hoffenheim)
Fired Hoffenheim to next season's Europa League by scoring four against Borussia Dortmund on the final day of the season, including a no-look penalty.

LUKA ROMERO
(Mallorca)
The Argentina U15 international became La Liga's youngest ever player at 15 years and 219 days.

ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI
(Bayern Munich)
Ended the season with 34 Bundesliga goals, the most prolific campaign since 1977, and won his fifth golden boot.

WorldSoccer



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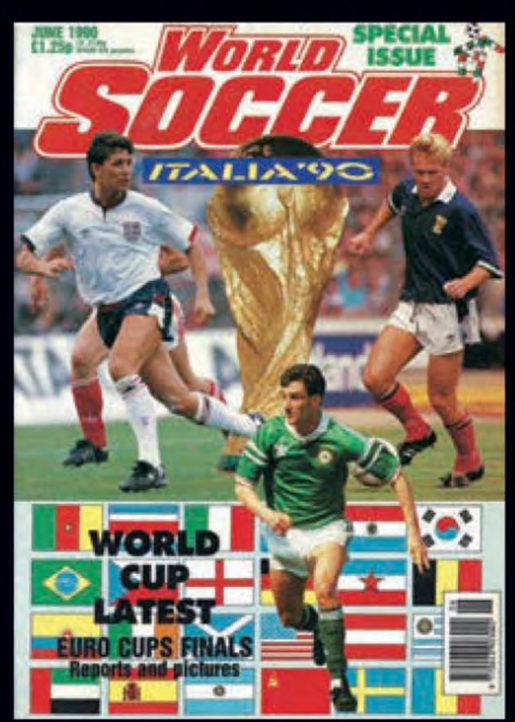

ON SALE NOW

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Project Restart

Sooner or later, one week or month or another, normal service had to be resumed. That applied for sport in general and football in particular as much as everyday life in cities, towns, villages and communities across Britain, Europe and the world in general.

Coronavirus has not killed at the massive rate of so-called "Spanish flu," which claimed 50 million victims worldwide just after the First World War. But it has undermined daily life in a manner unimaginable even as it began to take its fatal grip. Worldwide and national economies have been radically altered, and inevitably that has included sport.

In England, Friday, March 13, was the date football stopped. Three Brighton players tested positive for COVID-19 and so did Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta. Two weeks earlier, the Gunners had played Olympiakos in the Europa League when Evangelos Marinakis, the Greek club's unknowingly infected owner, had glad-handed everyone in sight – directors, officials, staff and players.

While the UK government dithered, the Premier League took the law into its own hands and halted the weekend schedule. Within little more than a week, the rest of the national game at professional and grassroots level for both men and women had followed suit. Scotland and Wales would both decide their leagues on a points-per-game basis.

This standstill was mirrored across Europe. UEFA's Champions and Europa Leagues, already disrupted by Italian and Spanish travel restrictions, were suspended; so were almost all major and minor leagues (barring, notably, Belarus whose president Alexander Lukashenko prescribed vodka and saunas as an antidote).

The cost in human misery – in jobs, family life, society in general – has been incalculable. The football industry is a tiny corner of that, but a corner of significance, nevertheless. The game has always been perceived for providing a haven of brief escape, uplift and inspiration for men and women, boys and girls, from all walks and stations of life. "The most important of all the unimportant issues in life," as Arrigo Sacchi famously said.

Project Restart... the Premier League is back

> Premier League clubs would lose £878m if closed-doors restrictions applied all the way through to the end of next season

At some point a route had to be found to press a reset button on daily life, including sport, amid the debate about balancing the needs of public health with an active society. Initial speculation reigned over how to resolve outstanding issues such as title awards, European slots and relegation should a resumption prove impossible. An added worry for mainstream leagues was having to hand back cash – in some cases already spent – to the broadcasters. A far greater worry for lower leagues and clubs was survival itself without gate receipts.

Different countries adopted differing approaches, which meant the enforcement of contrasting action. In France and the Netherlands, abandoning the season was an inevitable casualty of government prohibitions on professional sport. This was not the case in the UK. Early in May, foreign secretary Dominic Raab evinced a belief that the return of sport would "lift the spirits of the nation." That was the moment when Project Restart made sense. Then the German example proved inspirational with its meticulously-plotted methodology for health precautions and training protocols.

At some point in mid-May, "Yes, we could" became "Yes, we can." Special praise was due to Richard Masters. He had been appointed CEO of the Premier League only last December after being continually passed over by the panel hunting a successor to Richard Scudamore. He must have

Key role...Richard Masters has had an eventful start to his new role as Premier League chief executive

been intensely frustrated to step up from managing director to interim CEO as three outsiders fell through the appointments procedure. Low-key he may have been, but that steady hand on the tiller was central to restart planning.

Players' concerns were understandable as many fans told radio phone-ins that kicking a ball around was unthinkable while the UK grappled with the crisis. The likes of Chelsea's Willian and Manchester City's Sergio Aguero spoke to media in Brazil and Argentina of their fears; back in England, Watford captain Troy Deeney evoked concerns over both the health of his own son as well as the above-average fatality rate among the black, Asian and minority ethnic community.

Deeney and others stayed away, initially, when phase one – small group training – began. But once an easing of lockdown was accompanied by the start of club training and full-scale testing produced only a handful of positive cases, a spirit of can-do optimism invaded the game. Dates were nailed down, kick-off times agreed and live TV coverage scheduled.

Yet the financial black hole remains immense. One early estimate was that the pandemic would cost British sport – including rugby union and cricket plus many of the lower-profile Olympic disciplines – several billions of pounds. The debris would include clubs right across the sporting spectrum with lower-divisional football leading the way.

Business analyst Vysyble estimated Premier League clubs would lose £878m if closed-doors restrictions applied all the way through to the end of next season. On that basis Manchester United would lose £140m and Arsenal £122m.

At least the elite clubs can look that far ahead. Not so, further down the ladder. The English Football League was already staring down an estimated initial loss of £200m by September. Chair Rick Parry told a parliamentary panel that bankruptcy threatened many clubs because "in the Championship wages are 106 per cent of turnover."

Hence a football summer like no other – and fears of a bleak winter to follow.

One rule

FIFA opened a complex can of worms by effectively suspending the rules over political and social messaging when it urged FAs to "use common sense" in response to regulatory breaches by players – such as Jadon Sancho and Marcus Thuram – after the killing of unarmed George Floyd in the United States.

Protesting...Jadon Sancho has his say

This line had always held firm previously whether over British teams wearing the poppy symbol or Swiss/Albanian players taunting Serb opponents with their World Cup goal celebrations.

The laws of the game prohibit "any political, religious or personal slogans, statements or images" on kit. But FIFA president Gianni Infantino said: "In a FIFA competition the recent demonstrations of players in Bundesliga matches would deserve applause and not punishment."

His sentiment was appropriate but taking a subjective approach to protest issues promises confusion ahead.

Stein weighs in

Sixty years ago in October, *World Soccer* was launched. The inspiration was the fascination for foreign football generated by Real Madrid's magisterial 7-3 defeat of Eintracht Frankfurt in the 1960 European Cup Final.

11 of the 22 players – no substitutes then – are still alive. Frankfurt centre-forward Erwin Stein, now 85, has just recalled the occasion, how Frankfurt lost despite scoring first and despite his own two goals.

Comparing football then and now, Stein said: "Just look at the defenders today, how they almost dance on the ball. It's incredible. In my days defenders had to belt the ball as far forward as possible. And look at the balls themselves: beautifully light. Ours were so heavy, when it was wet, a header almost knocked you out."

World Soccer's 60th Anniversary issue is still available. Turn to page 13.

WINNERS

SON HEUNG-MIN
The Tottenham Hotspur striker won an award as the best shot during his three-week mandatory military service back in South Korea.

SKY TV
The restart of the Bundesliga behind closed doors was watched by over six million viewers, setting a new record for broadcasters Sky in Germany.

VITORINO HILTON
The Montpellier captain, who turns 43 in September, signed an extension to his contract to play another season for the Ligue 1 side.

REAL MADRID
It has been estimated that playing the remainder of La Liga's season behind closed doors will cost Real €160m – a figure that represents one-fifth of their annual budget.

GIOVANNI REYNA
Borussia Dortmund's 17-year-old was injured during the warm-up ahead of his first ever Bundesliga start and had to miss the derby with local rivals Schalke.

GELSON MARTINS
Banned for six months for pushing a referee, the Monaco winger's suspension was extended by three months to cover Ligue 1's stoppage.

LOSERS

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Does home advantage exist with no fans?

Football without fans is, well, if not nothing then certainly different. It looks different, it sounds different and, if the early weeks of the Bundesliga resumption were anything to go by, it produces different results. The sample size is small and it would be wrong to be too definitive about anything just yet, but results have been remarkable: home advantage appears to have been all but eradicated.

The first six rounds of fixtures after the restart yielded 11 home wins, 16 draws and 28 away wins. That is 20 per cent home wins, 29.1 per cent draws and 50 per cent away wins set against a season average before the resumption of 43.3 per cent home wins, 21.9 draws and 34.5 away wins. There are differences between countries in that regard: of the major leagues this season, it's been in Ligue 1 where home advantage has been strongest, 48 per cent home wins to 26.9 per cent away; then La Liga, 47.8 per cent to 24.3; then the Premier League, 44.8 to 30.2; then Italy, 40.2 to 37.1. Last season in Germany it was 45.1 per cent home wins to 31 per cent away.

These results may simply be quirky. It may be there have been a disproportionate number of games in which the away side has been stronger or in better form. But the difference since the resumption is nonetheless dramatic. It's possible that the oddity of playing without fans and with social distancing measures is, at least initially, more unsettling for the team more familiar with that environment. But familiarity should still make a difference: Thierry Henry, for instance, spoke of how he knew exactly where he was on the pitch at Highbury by a glimpse of an advertising hoarding or the way the light fell. The likelihood is that there will be some regression to the mean.

Replacements... Borussia Monchengladbach have filled empty seats with cardboard cut-outs of their fans

> Pressing has been between 10 and 15 per cent less intense since the restart

Crowds and their absence, though, do make a difference: something measured most readily in their apparent impact on referees. One incident so far in the Bundesliga stands out; had the Yellow Wall howled for a penalty when Jerome Boateng deflected Erling Haaland's shot wide with his arm during Bayern's win over Dortmund, the probability is that the subsequent corner would not have been taken so quickly. There would have been a VAR check, and then, possibly, a penalty.

But there is more direct influence as well. A University of Reading study looked at all 191 matches played behind closed doors across Europe's top five leagues and in UEFA competition between summer 2002 and the beginning of lockdown – although given there were no matches behind closed doors in England or Germany and only one in Spain, the domestic games considered were almost entirely in Italy and France. The findings were

Twelfth man...would a packed Yellow Wall have earned Dortmund a penalty against Bayern?

remarkable. With fans, home teams in those competitions win 46 per cent of the time and away teams 26 per cent; take away the fans, and the home-team advantage drops to 36-34.

Now, it is true that 191 games, while sizeable, is not a huge sample size. There are plenty of other possible factors that could be at play; a club that has committed an infraction that earns it the sanction of playing behind closed doors is probably going through a turbulent time anyway. But intriguing patterns occur in how those games played out.

The study found that away sides collected 0.5 fewer yellow cards in games behind closed doors than would be expected with a full crowd (it also produced evidence that reducing a crowd from 25,000 to 6,000 only lowered the number of yellow cards for the away side by 0.05). There are two possible, and probably interrelated, explanations for that. It could be that, as other studies have suggested, referees are influenced by the crowd – and perhaps then the number of people applying pressure is less significant than the fact there is any pressure at all. The evidence of the Bundesliga this season suggests that while away yellow cards have remained constant, home yellow cards are up by 0.5 per game, the same differential, just added to the home side rather than subtracted from the away. That may be indicative of the pressure on referees, or it may be that teams losing games commit more bookable fouls.

Referees are only part of the equation, though. The dynamic of matches has been different. Depending which model you use, pressing has been between 10 and 15 per cent less intense since the restart, probably an indication both of a dip in fitness and also co-ordinated training during lockdown. Goals from set-plays have gone up – again probably a result of reduced defensive training. Why that should benefit the away team is unclear.

As travelling has become easier and stadiums have become more homogenous, home advantage has been diminishing for some time. The early indications are that playing behind closed doors has accelerated that.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Costly error... Seoul were fined 100m Korean won for the mistake

1 ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

When the K-League kicked off in South Korea behind closed doors, FC Seoul came up with the idea of placing life-size dolls in the empty stands to give the impression of a crowd. Which seemed a good idea – until TV viewers spotted that the club had populated the stands with sex dolls ahead of the 1-0 win against Gwangju.

While the club insisted they were actually "premium mannequins" rather than sex dolls, they did have to admit that they came from a supplier that produces sex toys. And some of the dolls were even holding up signs advertising X-rated websites – despite pornography being banned in the country. The club have since been fined a league record $81,000 for the error.

2 FAST FOOD STUNT

Alajuelense's top-of-the-table clash with Deportivo Saprissa in Costa Rica's Liga FPD was overshadowed by a marketing stunt by Alajuelense winger Jonathan McDonald.

The 32-year-old Costa Rica international came off the bench in the 72nd minute with the name Burger King blazoned across the back of his shirt instead of his surname McDonald. He wasn't able to make as big an impression on the pitch, though – his side relinquished a 2-0 lead, with the 2-2 draw seeing both sides qualify for the Clausura play-offs.

3 PAYING TO PLAY

Capped 26 times by his country and a silver medallist at the 2008 Olympics, former Nigeria striker Chinedu Obasi claims he was told he would be included in his country's 2014 World Cup squad – as long as he paid a fee.

"I was playing with Schalke in the Champions League, everything was going fine," says the 33-year-old, who has been a free agent since leaving Swedish side AIK in January. "At the end of the season I was given an invitation for the World Cup preparations for friendlies in South Africa. Two days before the list came out, I was asked to pay some money if I wanted to be in the team."

4 SOCIAL SINS

MLS side Cincinnati FC took to Twitter to announce the appointment of new coach Jaap Stam, alongside an image of Ajax youth coach Tinus van Teunenbroek instead of the former Manchester United centre-back. Their MLS rivals responded with pictures of a variety of bald men: Columbus Crew welcomed actor Jason Statham, San Jose Earthquakes went for Bruce Willis, while Vancouver Whitecaps offered best wishes to *Austin Powers* villain, Dr. Evil.

5 INIESTA'S CHILDREN

In May, Andres Iniesta celebrated the anniversary of his equaliser against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in 2009 in an unusual way. The goal, which fired Barcelona to the Champions League final, also caused a spike in the birth rate in Catalonia. Iniesta phoned up some of his "kids," or "Iniestazos" as one father put it, to say hello and wish them a "happy conception day".

Birth spike... Iniesta's last-gasp strike caused a rise in pregnancies

"Playing without fans is sadder than dancing with your sister"

Spain coach Luis Enrique laments the lack of passion in stadiums without fans

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Permanent... Mauro Icardi

EUROPE

Paris Saint-Germain paid the €60million buy-out clause of on-loan Internazionale striker **MAURO ICARDI**.

Lyon signed on-loan Cameroon striker **KARL TOKO EKAMBI** from Villarreal for €11.5m.

Former Arsenal and Germany goalkeeper **JENS LEHMANN** joined Hertha Berlin's supervisory board, replacing Jurgen Klinsmann.

ALEKSANDAR RANKOVIC replaced Alan Pardew as coach of Dutch side ADO Den Haag, while **THOMAS LETSCH** took over from Edward Sturing at Vitesse.

Rangers signed **IANIS HAGI** for £3m on a permanent deal from Genk, with the midfielder having been on loan at the Scottish club since January.

Staying on...Odion Ighalo

New Ligue 2 side Pau appointed **DIDIER THOLOT** as coach after deciding not to extend the contract of Bruno Irles, despite him leading them to promotion.

Former Barcelona keeper **VICTOR VALDES** was named coach of Spanish fourth-tier side UA Horta.

JUANMA LILLO, who stood down as coach of Chinese side Qingdao Huanghai, was named assistant manager at Manchester City.

Ligue 1 side Angers broke their transfer record by paying €8m to Bordeaux for goalkeeper **PAUL BERNARDONI**.

FLORENTIN POGBA, elder brother to Paul, joined Ligue 2 side Sochaux.

ODION IGHALO's loan spell at Manchester United from Shanghai Shenhua was extended to January 2021.

CONCACAF

MLS side FC Cincinnati appointed **JAAP STAM** as coach.

Stepping up... Miroslav Klose

Klose returns

Germany's all-time leading scorer **MIROSLAV KLOSE**, who scored 71 goals in 137 internationals, was appointed Bayern Munich assistant coach for next season. The 41-year-old had been a youth coach at the club for the past two years after retiring as a player in 2016.

Appointments, sackings and loans

EUROPE

MARIO GOTZE, who scored the winner for Germany in the 2014 World Cup Final, will leave Borussia Dortmund this summer according to sporting director Michael Zorc, who said: "It was a mutual and respectful decision."

Former Spain and Barcelona goalkeeper **ANDONI ZUBIZARRETA** left his role as sporting director of Marseille.

Diego Simeone's long-time assistant **GERMAN BURGOS** will leave Atletico Madrid at the end of the season to pursue a career as a head coach in his own right.

Leaving for the second time...Mario Gotze

Ready for top job... German Burgos

"So let me explain our tactic: we are doing one injection of #covid19 once a week. We draw the player/member of staff who gets it [and] like this we are sure that we never play again and avoid relegation"

Watford defender Christian Kabasele sarcastically responds to the Hornets being accused of trying to avoid relegation

Appointments, sackings and loans

Hoffenheim head coach **ALFRED SCHREUDER** left the club due to "differing opinions on important details," according to a club statement.

LEE CATTERMOLE was released by Dutch side VVV Venlo after just 11 appearances in the Eredivisie.

CONCACAF

ALEKSANDAR KATAI parted company with LA Galaxy "by mutual consent" after his wife mocked the Black Lives Matter protests on Instagram.

ASIA

CHAN SIU KI, who is Hong Kong's all-time top scorer with 37 international goals, announced his retirement at the age of 34.

Released... Aleksandar Katai

Change of lifestyle

ANDREA BARZAGLI stepped down as Maurizio Sarri's assistant at Juventus. The former defender explained: "I felt the need to enjoy my family more. I chose to prioritise one family over another, Juventus."

Juve goodbye...Barzagli

PREMIER LEAGUE PLAYERS OUT OF CONTRACT AT THE END OF 2019-20

Aston Villa:
James Chester, Andre Green, Matija Sarkic

Bournemouth:
Artur Boruc, Charlie Daniels, Simon Francis, Andrew Surman

Brighton & Hove Albion:
Beram Kayal, Ezequiel Schelotto

Chelsea:
Pedro, Willian

Crystal Palace:
Stephen Henderson

Everton:
Leighton Baines, Maarten Stekelenburg

Leicester City:
Andy King, Nampalys Mendy

Liverpool:
Adam Lallana, Andy Lonergan

Manchester City:
Claudio Bravo, David Silva

Newcastle United:
Matty Longstaff

Sheffield United:
Leon Clarke, Kieron Freeman, Phil Jagielka, Jack Rodwell

Tottenham Hotspur:
Jan Vertonghen, Michel Vorm

Watford:
Heurelho Gomes, Jose Holebas, Adrian Mariappa

Francis...nine years at Bournemouth

Bye Blues... Willian

In demand...Longstaff will be a wanted man

So long, Spurs... Vertonghen

OBITUARIES

Oswaldo ALVAREZ (1956-2020)
Known as "Vadao", Alvarez led Brazil to victory at the Copa America Feminina in 2014 and 2018, fourth-place at the 2016 Women's Olympic tournament on home soil and the round of 16 at the last two Women's World Cups. Prior to working with the women's national team he coached numerous men's clubs, including Corinthians, Sao Paulo and Japanese side Tokyo Verdy.

Glyn PARDOE (1946-2020)
The youngest player to represent Manchester City, making his debut in April 1962 at the age of 15 years and 341 days, he spent his whole career at the club, making 380 appearances and winning the league championship in 1968, the 1969 FA Cup and the European Cup-winners Cup a year later. Also scored the winning goal in the 1970 League Cup Final against West Bromwich Albion.

Longevity...Vadao was a coach for almost 30 years

City legends...Pardoe (right) alongside Colin Bell (left)

Class of '68...Tony Dunne

Tony DUNNE (1941-2020)
Manchester United's starting left-back in the 1968 European Cup Final, Dunne joined the Red Devils eight years previously after starting his career in his birthplace, Dublin, with Shelbourne. The Republic of Ireland international was capped 33 times by his country, and won two league titles and an FA Cup at Old Trafford before joining Bolton and lifting the Second Division title.

Philippe REDON (1950-2020)
Scorer of Stade Rennes' first goal in European club competition, against Celtic in the 1971 European Cup, he later coached Cameroon at the 1992 Africa Cup of Nations and also had a brief spell in charge of Liberia in 2000.

Jimmy KIRUNDA (1950-2020)
Regarded as one of Uganda's greatest-ever players, he captained his country for ten years, leading the Cranes to the final of the 1978 Africa Cup of Nations, where they lost to hosts Ghana. He also skippered the side at the 1974 and 1976 tournaments, before going on to coach the national side from 1989 to 1996.

Luigi SIMONI (1939-2020)
After a playing career that took in Napoli, Torino and Juventus among others, he went on to coach sides such as Lazio, Napoli and Internazionale, winning the UEFA Cup and finishing runners-up in Serie A with the latter in 1998. He won promotion from Serie B seven times with five different clubs: Genoa, Pisa, Brescia, Cremonese and Ancona.

eye witness

Nick Bidwell reports

GERMANY

The return of the Bundesliga

Organised, rigorous and resourceful, while always at pains to put the science first, Germany has proved just as successful in dealing with the coronavirus at large as getting their domestic football up and running again.

The first major European nation to emerge from sporting lockdown was only out of commission for a couple of months before resuming the season with a calendar of fixtures behind closed doors. The Bundesliga's mid-May restart went ▸

The first...the Bundesliga was the first of Europe's big five leagues back in action

1. FC Köln
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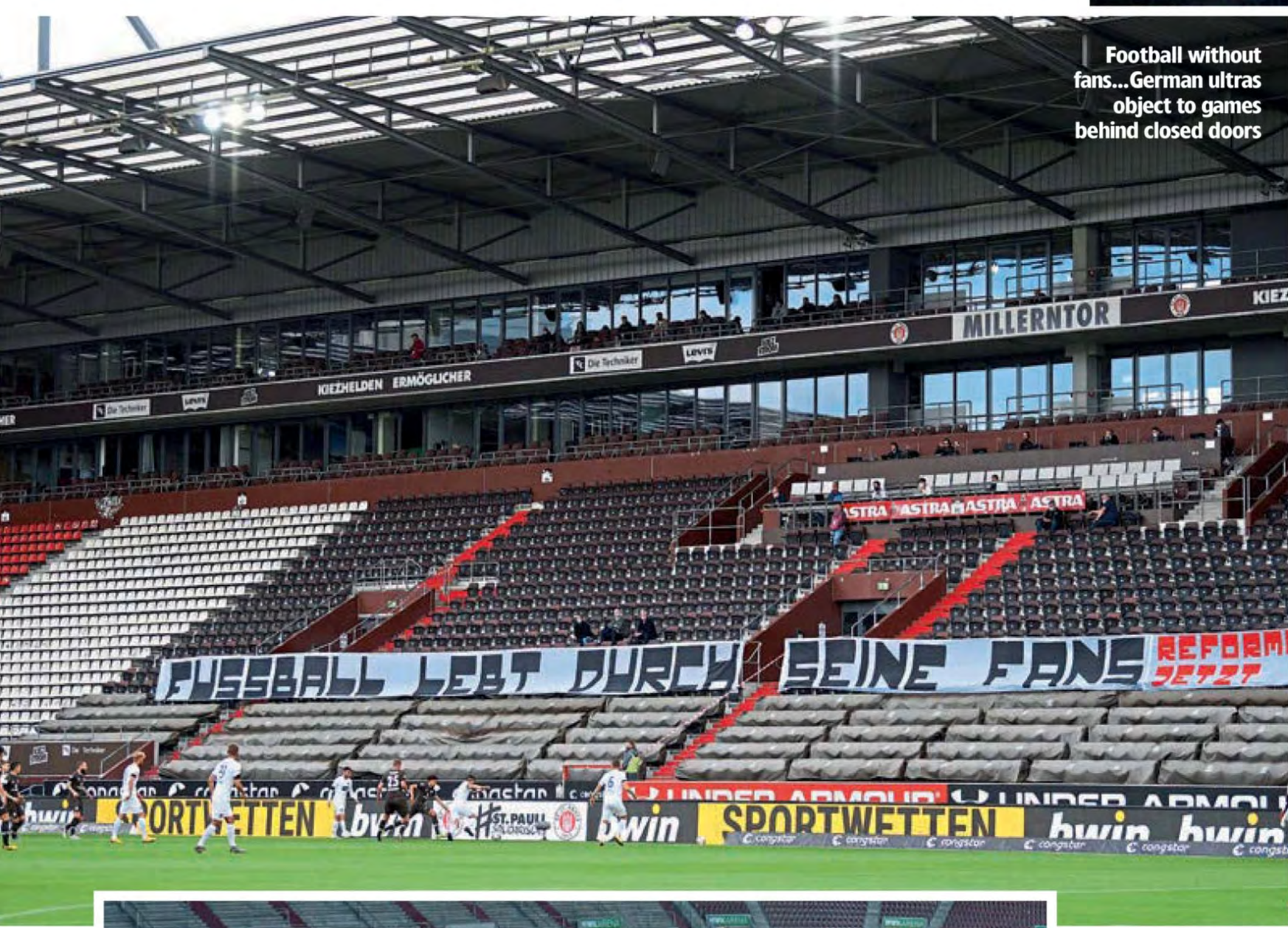
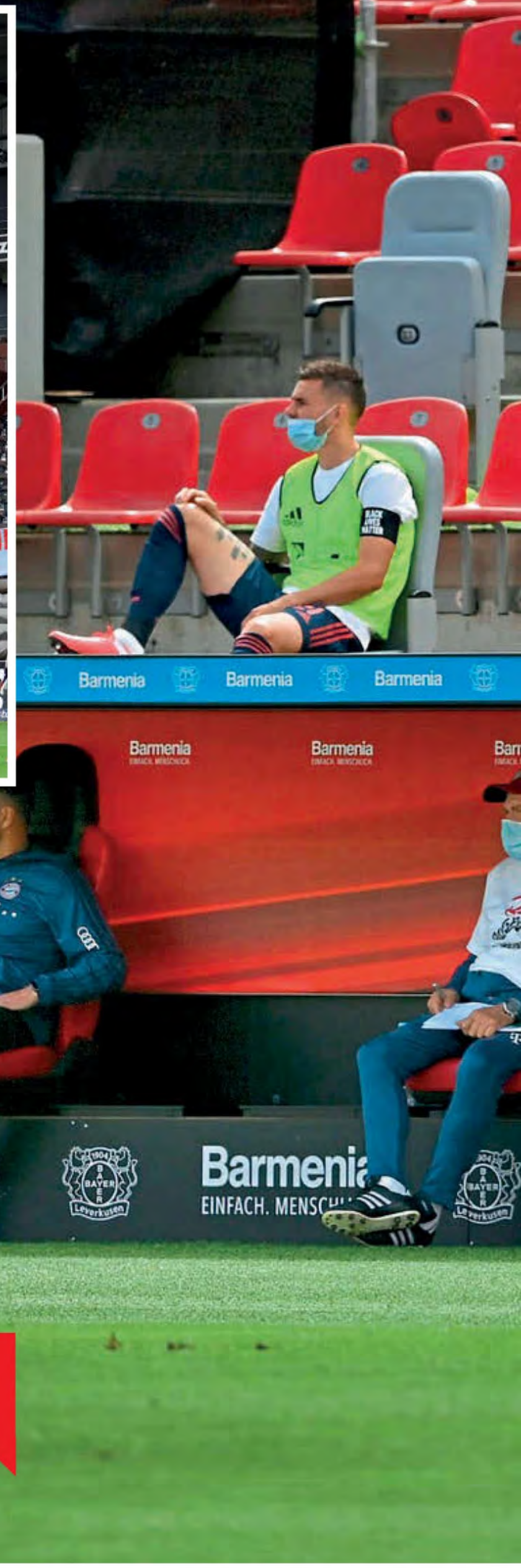
Dorint
NetCologne
Hotels & Resorts



Football without fans...German ultras object to games behind closed doors



A large portion of diehard fans are not at all enthused by the concept of games in empty stadia

remarkably well, offering the watching world a study in best emergency practice. We were entertained by high-quality play at a good tempo; tactical competence remained high – especially in the pressing schemes in the upper echelons of the table – and in a refreshing change of emphasis, wild challenges, player dissent and simulation somewhat went out of fashion.

In some ways, we returned to the core values of the beautiful game, a sport free of flimflam and extra-curricular bad intentions.

What's more, the new hygiene protocols quickly and efficiently became the norm: the disinfected balls, teams taking to the field separately, substitutes wearing masks, personalised water bottles, ample washing facilities, social distancing when conducting media interviews and, most important of all, the twice-weekly COVID-19 tests for players and staff.

Fortunately, red flags were few and far between. The exceptions? Three Cologne players who were discovered to be asymptomatic of the virus in late April and the huge difficulties experienced by second-tier Dynamo Dresden, who had to go into quarantine because of multiple infections.

Protest...stadiums instead of sofas

While main Bundesliga broadcaster *Sky Deutschland* registered record

Taking precautions... anti-COVID measures in action

viewing figures on the first weekend back, a large proportion of diehard fans are not at all enthused by the concept of games in empty stadia. Indeed, in a survey conducted by the media outlet *Deutsche Welle*, only a third of respondents were in favour of non-spectator football. For good reason, huge numbers of supporters up and down the country come out in

a rash when *geisterspiele* (ghost games) are mentioned. Most supporters see themselves as an integral part of a living, breathing matchday scene. They very much baulk at the thought of a game entirely run for the benefit of TV companies.

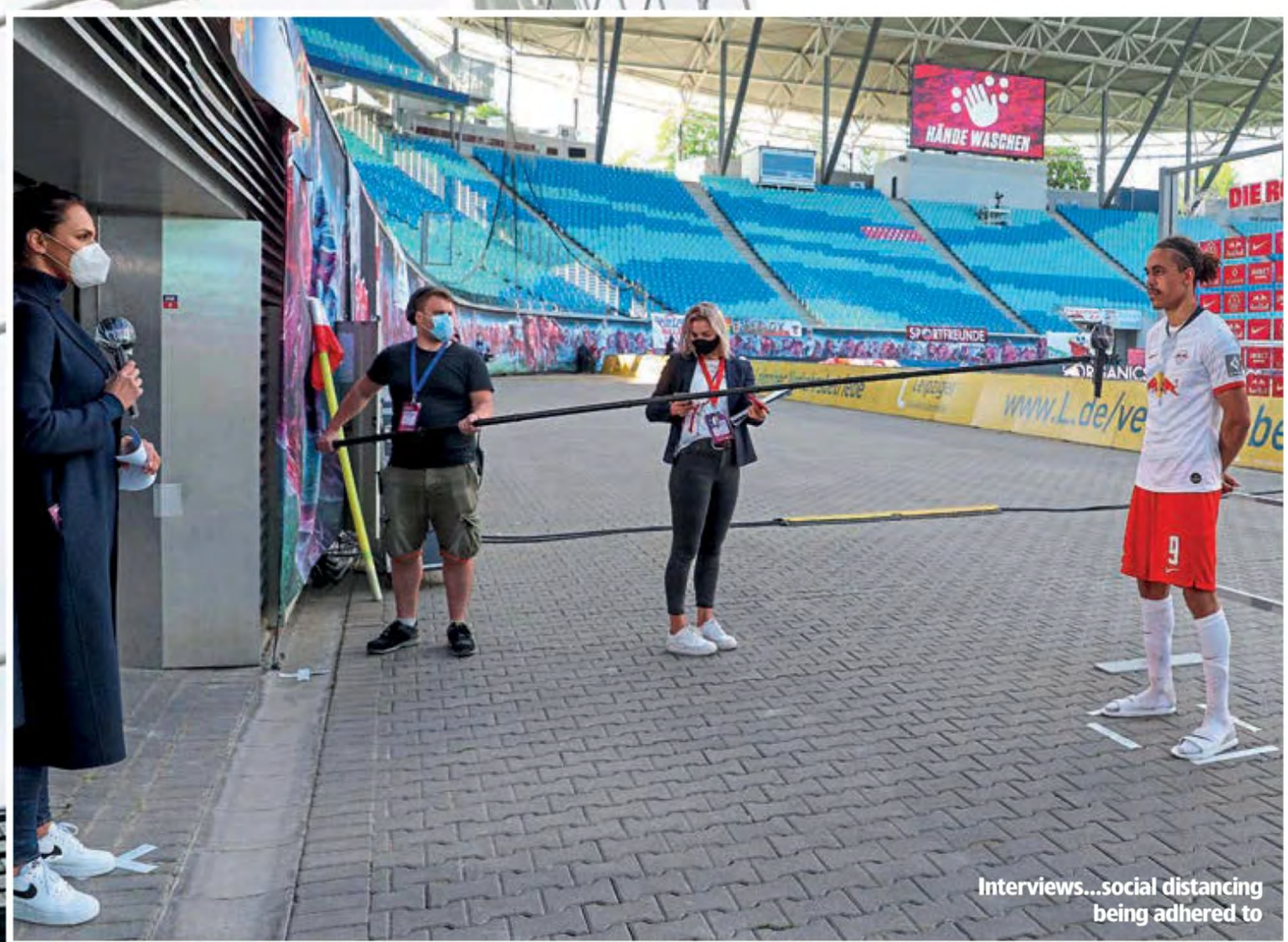
Fans are increasingly concerned that football is becoming detached from the rest of society, that community identity and organic terrace values are fast losing ground to commercialism. Groups of ultras, most adept at fighting a PR war, were not slow to let their feelings be known. In front of Cologne's RheinEnergieStadion, club fans left a couch emblazoned with the tag line: "Stadium Instead Of Sofa. Against Ghost Games." A banner behind the goal at Augsburg ploughed a similar furrow: "Football will survive.

Goal...Cologne's Jhon Cordoba scores against Fortuna Dusseldorf

Your business is sick." Meanwhile at second-division club St. Pauli, an outfit known for the radicalism of its fan base, another placard was unfurled in the main stand: "Football lives through its fans."

When vowing to finish the campaign come hell or high water, the DFL, who run the Bundesliga, undoubtedly were inspired by considerations of the common good: the preservation of the integrity of their competitions and giving the general public a morale boost in tough times. But, ultimately, it was the threat of mammoth financial losses that concentrated minds in the DFL corridors of power. Without a resumption the fourth and final instalment of the national TV deal would not have been paid, thus leaving the clubs with a €304million hole in their budgets. Leading German sports magazine *Kicker* estimated that up to 13 of the country's 36 pro teams could have faced insolvency.

Like it or not, TV is the piper who calls the tune in the Bundesliga. Annually the German League rakes in over €1billion, a figure that accounts for well over a third of the turnover of clubs in the top two divisions. Remove that chunk of funding and you have a house of cards.



Interviews...social distancing being adhered to

Like it or not, TV is the piper who calls the tune in the Bundesliga

A crystal ball is not required to foresee the painful economic consequences coming down the tracks. With ghost games costing German clubs over €80m, the prospect of less TV cash in the future and austerity squeezing commercial income streams, the clubs will have to cut costs. And that means less liquidity for transfer fees and wages. A salary cap may be on the cards. Certain clubs and private investors may well lobby for changes to German football's signature 50+1 rule, whereby members hold the

Champions... Bayern celebrate in an empty Weserstadion

majority shareholding of German teams.

Another, wholly different view, is focused on creating a brand-new model for clubs, one with social responsibility, economic sustainability and environmental priorities at its core. St. Pauli president Oke Gottlich, a member of the DFL executive, is one of the chief proponents of this school of thought. He wants the DFL to be more independent of spirit, marking out a sphere of influence far removed from the national federation, the DFB.

In the absence of intimidating home fans, visitors no longer appear burdened by a fear factor. Without a full house to emotionally plug into, home teams have become lost and confused

Out of reach...Kimmich scores against Dortmund

In terms of the German hierarchy, the COVID-19 hiatus has wrought almost no change. Bayern Munich won an eighth consecutive Bundesliga, all but guaranteeing top spot by beating Borussia Dortmund 1-0 in their third game after the restart. Joshua Kimmich's exquisite chip over keeper Roman Burki was enough to seal the three points in front of an empty Westfalenstadion.

The league-defining victory was one of several away victories seen since the restart, with the impotence of home teams becoming a key phenomenon of the Bundesliga. In the absence of intimidating home fans, visitors no longer appear burdened by a fear factor. Without a full house to emotionally plug into, home teams have become lost and confused. A little like German ultras at the moment.

experteye

Former Bayer Leverkusen striker **Dimitar Berbatov** picks his favourite Bundesliga stars…

Jadon Sancho
(Borussia Dortmund)
"Sancho is unbelievable: the speed, the goals, the passing and his eye for the pass. He isn't selfish – if you have over 15 assists it must be because you play the ball when you have the chance and someone is in a better position. He moved to Germany at a very young age and it looks to be paying off massively. That was maybe the best decision he has made so far. He is developing and now big teams are coming after him, but I don't know if now is the right time for him to go to Manchester United, because they already have Anthony Martial, Marcus Rashford and Daniel James. It's good to have competition for the team but I would imagine if he moves to a new place he would want to play every game."

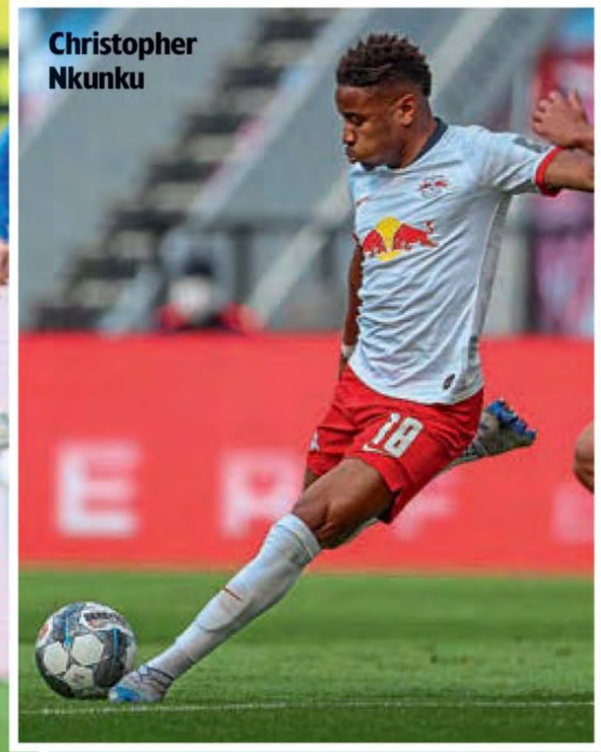
Kai Havertz
(Bayer Leverkusen)
"He is one of the most talented players in the Bundesliga. He's a very young player and I think a lot of big clubs around Europe will be watching him. For me he has the speed, he has the vision, he knows how to position himself on the pitch, he can score goals and he can make assists. Of course, he is far from the complete player, but this will happen when he makes the next step in his career. I like watching him a lot and hopefully he can continue developing the way he has been so far."

Kai Havertz

Christopher Nkunku
(RB Leipzig)
"I actually don't know where he plays; he plays on the left, on the right, he can play as a striker. He got 12 assists in the Bundesliga (before lockdown) and he has that quickness, sharpness and that eye for the final pass. Probably half of his assists were for Timo Werner – they had a good partnership going on. Even when he comes on as a substitute his attitude is right. He is running, chasing, sprinting and doing what he can do."

Alphonso Davies
(Bayern Munich)
"I mainly watch strikers, but the left-back at Bayern is unbelievable. If we had a race, me and him, I would probably still be in the starting position when he gets to the finishing line. That guy is unbelievably quick. The way he has taken to the Bundesliga is crazy, it's like he's been playing there for 20 years, and he's made the left-back position his own. He's confident on the ball and the way he plays the game, he runs forward and isn't afraid to attack and cross. And he knows that he is really quick, so he has no problem coming back even if he is out of position."

Jadon Sancho


Christopher Nkunku

Alphonso Davies

*Dimitar Berbatov is a **Betfair** ambassador.*

Nico Yennaris

Ex-Arsenal youngster key to the future of Chinese football

Victory...Yennaris celebrates a 7-0 win over Guam

Brentford to Beijing is not a well-worn football route and neither is England Under-19s to the Chinese national team, but these are the journeys that have been undertaken by Nico Yennaris, known in China as Li Ke.

There have been plenty of headlines written internationally about the big-name foreign imports that have headed to the Chinese Super League, but much more discussed inside the country of late is the naturalisation of a growing number of football players. Three years ago, Guangzhou Evergrande chairman Xu Jiayin said that he wanted a team full of Chinese players by 2020. It is a dream that is coming closer to reality for one team, but not in the way that people expected.

Yennaris was born and raised in England to a Chinese mother, and he left second-tier English side Brentford in January 2019 to join Beijing Guoan, one of the country's bigger clubs. It was the start of a new policy in Chinese football. Authorities had declared that they wanted to be a global powerhouse by 2050. If the short-term step was to sign a host of big-name global stars such as Oscar, Hulk and Paulinho, and the long-term is investment in youth, then medium-term is giving some overseas players with Chinese heritage a Chinese passport, as well as some of the best foreigners in the Chinese Super League.

The London-born 27-year-old, who made one Premier League appearance for Arsenal in 2012, settled quickly into the Chinese Super League and was a

> "He has become one of the best midfielders in China. His work rate and intelligence have been a real asset to the team"
>
> **Beijing Guoan coach Bruno Genesio**

Aritz Aduriz

Bilbao says goodbye to a legend

solid presence in the middle of the pitch at the capital's Workers' Stadium. Beijing, title winners just once back in 2009, pushed champions Guangzhou Evergrande all the way and finished just two points behind the team that took an eighth title in nine seasons.

"He has become one of the best midfielders in China," says Beijing coach Bruno Genesio. "His work rate and intelligence have been a real asset to the team. We have more of the ball when he plays and we use it better."

The French tactician wasn't the only one to notice. In May 2019, Yennaris earned a call-up from China coach Marcello Lippi. Lippi, whose return for a second spell in charge was reportedly on the condition that China would naturalise players, left last November after poor results in qualification for the 2022 World Cup. It seemed at first that replacement Li Tie was not a fan. The former Everton and Sheffield United player omitted the midfielder from his first squad named ahead of what should have been March's qualifiers which never happened. Despite the fact that there have been no games since, Yennaris was recalled for a May training camp in Shanghai along with Elkeson and Aloisio.

The naturalisation of Brazilians such as these has been controversial. Bringing in those with Chinese parents is one thing, but adding those with no ties to the country except football has provoked complaints about changing the character of the national team.

That is not a problem for Yennaris, who has the heritage and is learning the language. If he can help Beijing go one better in 2020, when the season eventually starts, and help China qualify for the 2022 World Cup – still possible – then Li Ke will become a major star. And if he then moves back to Europe, he does so as a big-name Chinese player with all the attention, pressure and rewards that may entail. There is a long way to go before that happens, but the journey has already been an interesting one for the English-born Chinese midfielder.

John Duerden

Athletic Bilbao legend Aritz Aduriz has given up hopes of ending his career in the perfect way. The 39-year-old was due to play his final game against hometown rivals Real Sociedad in an all-Basque Copa del Rey Final but, with a revised date for the clash not yet in sight, the striker has admitted defeat in his race to recover from a hip injury and announced his retirement.

As the "grandfather of La Liga", it's fitting that the forward's career ends with him needing a hip replacement. In an Instagram post, Athletic's third-top goalscorer of all time said: "Unfortunately, my body has said enough is enough. Let's forget about the dream endings – this is where the journey ends for me."

While he was robbed of the fairy-tale ending that he had in mind, his final goal for the club could hardly have been more special. Aduriz joined Athletic's home clash against Barcelona back in August with the scores tied at 0-0. Within 65 seconds of his arrival, the ageing front man put his side ahead with an incredible bicycle kick that stunned the champions and caused the San Mames to erupt.

It was the 285th – and by far most spectacular – goal of a career that has improved with age. He joined Athletic for the third time in 2012 at the age of 31, and has scored 96 of his 158 La Liga goals since. The only current players with more goals in the league are Karim Benzema and Lionel Messi, while his stunning effort against Barca ensured that he matched Messi's record of scoring in 15 La Liga seasons in a row. Despite standing at just under 6ft tall, he had a prodigious leap, allowing him to score with 48 headers in Spain's top division – only Cristiano Ronaldo has more.

In 2015-16 Aduriz hit his peak: for the second season in a row he won the Zarra Trophy, awarded to the top-scoring Spaniard in La Liga. He scored 36 goals in all competitions, starting with a hat-trick against Barcelona in the Supercopa, as Athletic lifted their first trophy for over 30 years. The following February he turned 35, and a month later earned his second Spain cap – six years after the first. He bagged his first goal in a friendly against Italy, and went to Euro 2016 as Spain's oldest player, before becoming their oldest-ever goalscorer in November.

Both Athletic and Real Sociedad are determined that their final will be played in front of a full stadium, even if that means waiting until 2021. As he can't be on the pitch, Aduriz will have to settle for being among the thousands of Basques in the stands instead.

Jamie Evans

HONOURS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- Spanish Supercopa (2015)
- 2x Europa League Golden Boots (2015-16, 2017-18)
- 13 Spain caps, two goals
- Basque Country national team record scorer (12 goals)
- 18th top scorer in La Liga history
- Athletic's record scorer in Europe

Final farewell goal... a bicycle kick to seal a 1-0 win over Barcelona

Didier Drogba

Legendary striker's bid to enter the world of football politics

Didier Drogba had some tumultuous battles on the African football stage during his storied career with the Ivory Coast, but his bid to become president of the country's football federation could be his toughest yet.

The 42-year-old is one of three candidates for the August 22 poll – if he obtains the requisite endorsements in time – as he seeks to set out on a political career that has as its ultimate aim the presidency of the Confederation of African Football.

In order to do so, Gianni Infantino told him last year, Drogba must first look to head his own country's association (FIF), but despite his popularity in the Ivory Coast, that is going to be tough to achieve.

In his favour, Drogba has star appeal and the trappings of celebrity that have served several novice politicians well in recent times, and he has also made significant charitable contributions to the country through his foundation.

Ranged against him, however, are questions about his actual interest in the Ivorian game, doubts about his wider intentions, and accusations about his patriotism.

Drogba has not helped his cause in the months since declaring his candidacy by blundering through some of the protocols that are so crucial to winning support in Africa, and thereby offending sensibilities.

He is also struggling to shake off the image of being a "transplanted" Ivorian. Yes, he was born in Abidjan but he was just a young boy when he left for France and, although he elected to play for the Ivorian Elephants before he could be picked for the French national team, Abidjan has never been his home.

Stuck in the Ivorian coastal city for the coronavirus lockdown period, some local media have dryly commented it is the "longest time he had spent in the country", accusing him of always only staying a handful of days in Abidjan before jetting back to Europe – a pattern that started when he was first selected for the national team and has continued through his various post-career business and philanthropic activities.

In order to be included on the ballot, Drogba must be nominated by three of the 14 Ligue 1 clubs, two from the lower divisions and one of the five special interest groupings that are also affiliates

Diplomat...speaking at an event in Abidjan last year

Drogba's bid to become president of the country's football federation could be his toughest battle yet

Elephants icon... Drogba is Ivory Coast's all-time top scorer with 65 goals

Charitable nature... attending the inauguration of the "WinWin" Agora-Koumassi social-cultural sports centre

of the Ivorian federation. These include the ex-players' association, of which he is a board member, but they are refusing to endorse him because he did not consult with them first.

Skipping this process could prove a death knell as African culture places a heavy emphasis on protocol and respect – even if you are a Champions League winner and African sporting icon.

Drogba also did not endear himself to club bosses when he invited them via WhatsApp to come and hear his plans for the association. For many, an old fashioned personal invitation was what they expect in a region where traditions die hard.

Also standing for the FIF presidency is Sory Diabate, a long-serving vice-president and powerful chairman of the professional league who is the favourite to win, and Idrissa Diallo. A former business partner of Drogba, Diallo initially suggested that the ex-Chelsea player join his ticket as the vice-president candidate, in order to learn the ropes before launching his own bid for the top job, but Drogba believes his time is now.

If Drogba is successful, he will follow just a handful of top African stars into the administration of the game. Kalusha Bwalya, the 1988 African Footballer of the Year, was president of the Football Association of Zambia and a CAF executive committee member before FIFA banned him for taking Qatari money, while Abedi Pele briefly served as vice-president of the Ghana Football Association.

Mark Gleeson

Joan Laporta

Ex-Barcelona president hoping for another bite at the cherry

For Barcelona, 2020 has been less *mes que un club*, and more "mess of a club". The sacking of Ernesto Valverde in January – the club's first mid-season change of coach since Louis van Gaal was replaced by Radomir Antic in 2003 – preceded director of football Eric Abidal and Lionel Messi taking swings at each other on social media, the I3 Ventures "Barca Gate" scandal and the subsequent resignation of six of current president Jose Maria Bartomeu's board.

> "I would very much like Guardiola to come back, but now he is at City and it is a decision that Pep should take"

Back again... Laporta (middle) and Guardiola (right) to be reunited?

Among all that disarray, Joan Laporta saw an opportunity. With Bartomeu's turbulent reign set to end in the summer of 2021, Laporta offered himself as the solution to the club's crisis – the man in charge from 2003 to 2010, and who failed in a further bid in 2015, intends to run for presidency once more. "We want to recover the club's prestige," he insisted in April. "I'm gathering people to present a project and getting increasingly excited."

Indeed, Barcelona fans often reminisce about the years the charismatic lawyer was in charge of *La Blaugrana*. With club legend Johan Cruyff as his friend and advisor, Laporta was able to enforce the Dutchman's ideals of how the club should be run – from promoting the use of players from La Masia and on-field total football tactics, to the instigation of UNICEF as the club's first-ever shirt sponsor.

Perhaps more importantly for Laporta, he was also able to appease fans by ending a six-year wait for a major trophy. Spearheaded by marquee signing Ronaldinho and coach Frank Rijkaard, the team developed into a well-oiled winning machine, culminating in back-to-back La Liga titles and the 2006 Champions League.

His next move proved even more fruitful. As the team's form dropped during the 2007-08 campaign, Laporta chose to wait until the end of the season to dismiss Rijkaard, thus allowing Barcelona B team coach Pep Guardiola to take the job under easier circumstances.

Appointing an untested and inexperienced coach might have seemed a bold move to many, but Laporta saw the former *Dream Team* captain and proud Catalan as the ideal candidate to uphold the club's ethos, and backed his decision to discard experienced Champions League winners like Ronaldinho, Deco and Gianluca Zambrotta. He was totally vindicated as the club recorded its best-ever season, winning the treble of La Liga, the Copa del Rey and the Champions League.

Taking that success into account, and the fact that the Manchester City manager's contract runs out in 2021, it was perhaps no real shock that Laporta would turn to him again in this presidential campaign.

Trophy-laden... a match made in heaven

"I would very much like Guardiola to come back, but now he is at City and it is a decision that Pep should take. He is a benchmark for Barcelona and many Catalans would like him to coach Barca again." No presidential promise is set in stone, of course – remember it was Laporta who guaranteed signing David Beckham in 2003, only for the midfielder to join Real Madrid instead. But, from that campaign charge, Laporta learnt the value of sweet talking supporters.

"Messi will have no trouble renewing his contract," he said in one of his earlier interviews this year, before adding on Neymar: "They weren't clear with him. I'd bring him back for sure."

However, whether Pep would be interested in working under Laporta again is another matter, with extracts from Catalan journalist Marti Perarnau's book *Pep Confidential* suggesting that there were strains in their relationship.

"He [Pep Guardiola] had found in Joan Laporta a dynamic but pushy man who could be supportive one minute and undermining the next...At times, Pep felt like the captain of a ponderous ocean liner, as he fought to steer the team in one direction, while the club pulled in the other. No decision was straightforward," it reads.

Decisions will hardly be straightforward for Barcelona *socios*

when the election comes around. Laporta faces stiff competition from Victor Font, who already harbours ambitions to convince Xavi – who rejected Bartomeu in January – to become coach.

With future presidential debates likely to revolve around finances, due to the ongoing and lasting effects of COVID-19, businessman Font will expect to have the upper hand on a past president who was often labelled profligate, and said to have amassed thousands of euros in unnecessary expenses.

Laporta was also accused of having altered the club's accounts in his final year to convert a €79.6million loss into an €11.1m profit. While a Spanish judge ruled in 2014 that Laporta wouldn't have to pay for losses generated while the club was under his control, an audit carried out by Deloitte at the end of his helm revealed Barcelona were in a worse position financially than perhaps he'd let on.

How much weight the club's finances has on this presidential campaign will ultimately fall on the *socios* but, in the meantime, Laporta will just keep saying what he believes the fans want to hear: "I'm really excited about being in charge for this period. I see myself winning the Champions League and La Liga with this team."

Jared Tinslay

Neil Lennon

Starting and finishing "The Nine"

Having matched the record-breaking feat of Jock Stein's Celtic winning nine successive Scottish titles between 1966 and 1974, and Rangers' run from 1989 to 1997, Neil Lennon's focus is already on next season.

"Even when I took over and we got to eight, people were talking about ten," says the Celtic manager. "We had to get the nine first and thankfully that's been accomplished now. The supporters are talking about ten, and we can now go for the ten – I know that's been on the tip of a lot of our supporters' tongues."

A winner of five league titles as a player with the club, Lennon led the Hoops to the first of the nine in 2012 during his first spell as manager. Two more followed before he headed south of the border for Bolton Wanderers, during which time Ronny Deila and Brendan Rodgers led the side to two titles apiece.

On returning to Glasgow in February 2019, after a spell in Edinburgh with Hibernian, the former Northern Ireland midfielder picked up where he left off with another championship and then made it nine in a row for the Bhoys when the latest campaign was officially stopped in May.

"I grew up on stories of that [Jock Stein] team, so to be here as the manager when we've won our ninth title in a row is very special," says Lennon. "When I got the job a second time I was under a lot of scrutiny. It has taken a lot of hard work, a lot of pain at times, a lot of pressure, but it's all worth it."

13 points clear of second-place Rangers with eight games to play when the Premiership was halted in March, Celtic also won this season's League Cup and were due to face Aberdeen in the Scottish Cup semi-finals, which the Scottish Football Association still hopes will take place.

If the competition does continue, the other semi would see Hibernian take on neighbours Hearts, who have more reason than most to feel aggrieved by the league campaign's early finish. Four points adrift at the foot of the table, Hearts were relegated to the Championship when average-points-per-game was used to determine the final positions.

While not ruling out a legal challenge to their demotion – which, according to a club statement "would be both time consuming and expensive", although "the cost to the club of relegation would outweigh these considerations" – Hearts could yet be handed a lifeline as owner Ann Budge works on a proposal for a temporary league reconstruction that would involve expanding the top flight.

"It is fundamentally wrong that any club should be unfairly penalised by exceptional decisions that have had to be taken to deal with the current crisis," argues Budge. "I would stand by that view, regardless of Hearts' own position."

Nich Hills

> "The supporters are talking about ten, and we can now go for the ten"

Lennon...dreaming of ten in a row

Newcastle United

Frustration in the bid to wrest control away from Mike Ashley

Newcastle fans have long grown weary of the saga: inflated rumours of a buyer to relieve the club of the burdensome ownership of Mike Ashley followed by the pin-pricking reality of yet another consortium – Chinese, American, Russian, whoever – collapsing.

Blame was appointed in both directions: that Ashley set the financial bar too high to repay his original purchase and subsequent investment, or that interested investors thought they could use his desperation for an exit to drive down the price.

All those reservations fell away once it emerged that Amanda Staveley, the businesswomen exploring a deal for the past four years, was ready to deliver an offshoot of the state of Saudi Arabia. No worries about oil-rich ready cash this time. In addition, billionaire brothers David and Simon Reuben, second-wealthiest family in *The Sunday Times Rich List*, were in support.

The price had edged down. Ashley was reported as asking for £370million, but this had slipped to £300m by the initial agreement in April after the multiple business uncertainties created by COVID-19.

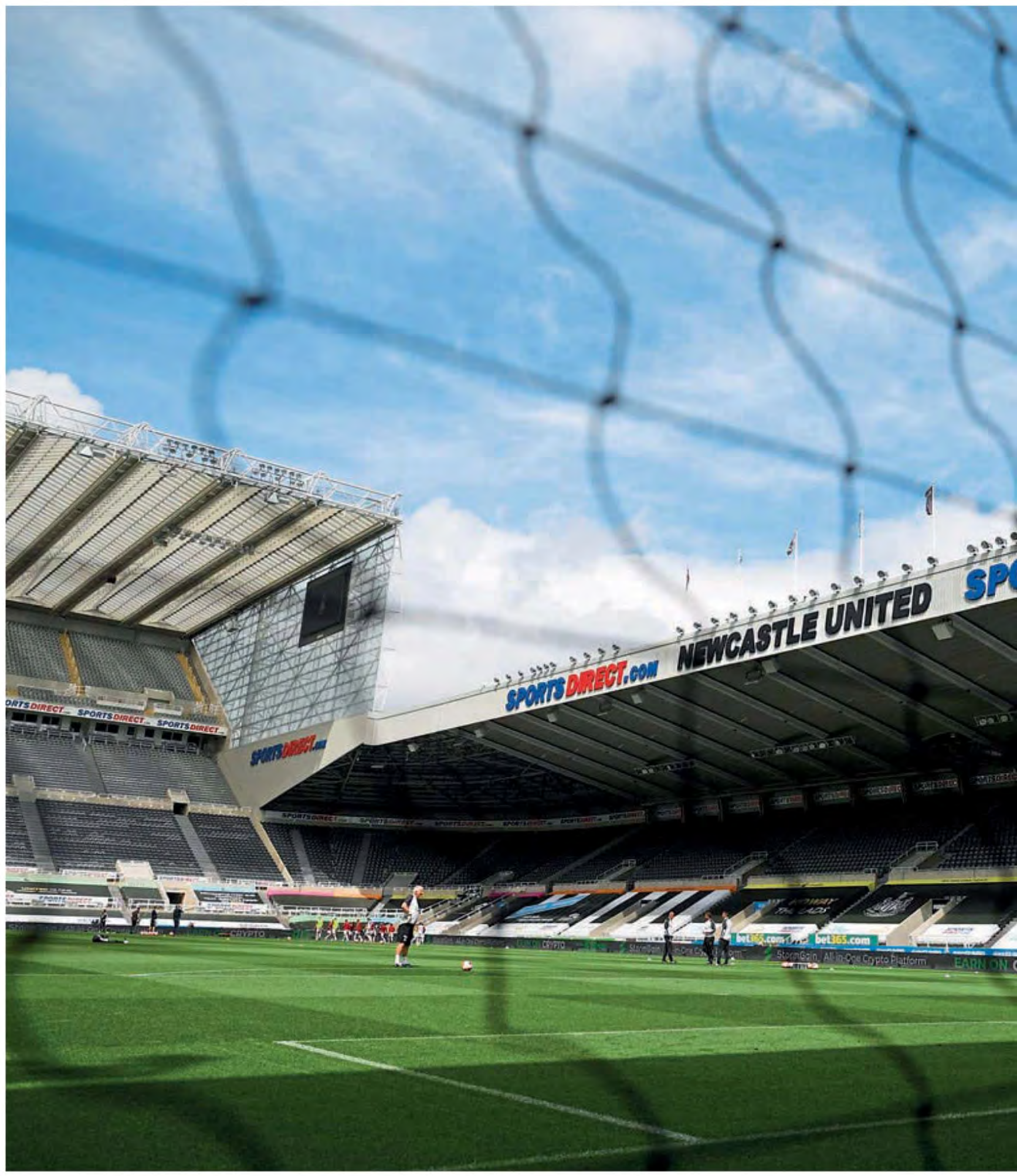
Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), chaired by the all-powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, would take up 80 per cent of the club, with 10 per cent each for the Reuben brothers and for Staveley's PCP Capital Partners.

So far, so good. In fact, a bid from, for example, Russia would have been less controversial. The reasons were two-fold: firstly, the Saudi record on human rights and, secondly, the state's hosting of a satellite channel pirating international transmission of major sports events – including the Premier League.

Amnesty International accused Saudi Arabia of torture in detention, corporal punishment of both men and women (such as public floggings), "cross amputations" (where the opposite hand and foot are removed) of thieves, dozens of executions (many in public beheadings), no free speech, discrimination against women (particularly in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance), long-term detention without trial for activists and religious discrimination against the Shi'a minority.

All this in addition to the long-running military action which has seen countless deaths in Yemen plus the murder of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul.

The Saudi response was to justify its right to run its own affairs as it chose



No change...for now, Mike Ashley's Sports Direct logo remains at St. James' Park

Takeover bid...Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud

PREMIER LEAGUE'S WEALTHIEST OWNERS

The Saudi takeover would have given Newcastle the richest owners in the Premier League

1. Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund	***Newcastle United***	***£320bn***
2. Sheikh Mansour	*Manchester City*	*£23.3bn*
3. Roman Abramovich	*Chelsea*	*£9.6bn*
4. Stan Kroenke	*Arsenal*	*£6.8bn*
5. Guo Guangchang	*Wolverhampton Wanderers*	*£5.2bn*
6. Nassef Sawiris	*Aston Villa*	*£5bn*
7. Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha	*Leicester City*	*£4.6bn*
8. Joe Lewis	*Tottenham Hotspur*	*£3.9bn*
9. Glazer Family	*Manchester United*	*£3.6bn*
10. Gao Jisheng	*Southampton*	*£3.1bn*
11. Joshua Harris	*Crystal Palace*	*£2.9bn*
12. John W. Henry	*Liverpool*	*£2.1bn*
13. David Sullivan & David Gold	*West Ham United*	*£1.6bn*
14. Farhad Moshiri	*Everton*	*£1.5bn*
15. Tony Bloom	*Brighton & Hove Albion*	*£1.3bn*
16. Maxim Demin	*Bournemouth*	*£900m*
17. Prince Abdullah Bin Musa'ed	*Sheffield United*	*£198m*
18. Gino Pozzo	*Watford*	*£93m*
19. Mike Garlick	*Burnley*	*£62m*
20. Delia Smith & Michael Wynn Jones	*Norwich City*	*£23m*

while pointing to progress such as appointing a first female ambassador (to the United States) and allowing women to drive.

For the thousands of Newcastle fans that took up the Saudi flag motif, these criticisms were either irrelevant or hypocritical. Premier League club owners hail from China to Russia, neither country a bastion of western concepts of freedom.

Further, human rights is not a relevant issue for the Premier League's "fit and proper person" test. Formal criminal convictions, however, are another matter. This is where the Saudi bid was possibly vulnerable.

In June 2017, a Saudi-led coalition launched an economic blockade of neighbouring Qatar. One of the weapons was a satellite broadcaster that pirated sports broadcasts by Qatar's *beIN Media* in the Middle East and North Africa. The interloper was named *beoutQ*, the clue to its purpose being in the name.

For the thousands of Newcastle fans that took up the Saudi flag motif, these criticisms were either irrelevant or hypocritical

Coverage of the World Cup, European Championship, Champions League and Europe's major leagues were all hijacked, along with other major international sports events.

Protests to the Saudi government went unheeded; no local lawyers dared take up the case. But in April the United States placed Saudi Arabia on a "priority watch list" because of *beoutQ's* activities, then the World Trade Organisation declared it in breach of international law.

This was uncomfortable for the Premier League. Firstly, takeover critics claimed this as evidence that the Saudi state, as controller of the PIF, was a lawbreaker. Secondly, as *beIN Media* warned, approving the Newcastle takeover would be a massive snub to one of the Premier League's most valuable international broadcast partners.

Here were objections that could not be dismissed lightly at a time of unprecedented economic turbulence for football. The latest twist in the saga was the Saudi Arabian Football Federation writing to major sports bodies acknowledging it has a "responsibility" to help fight broadcasting piracy, and insisting that it "understands the need to protect and respect intellectual property rights".

To *beIN* or not to *beIN*? That was the question.

Keir Radnedge

6 of the best

Title Winners

Nich Hills looks at the players who made the difference for Europe's title-winning sides

1 Odsonne EDOUARD

CELTIC (SCOTLAND)

With 22 goals in 27 games, the French striker played a big part in Celtic's ninth consecutive league title, and manager Neil Lennon is hoping he can hold on to him for what could be a record-breaking season in 2020-21.

"He seems quite happy here," says Lennon. "We are going for ten in a row and that might be a big motivating factor for him to stay." However, the 22-year-old's eye for goal has made him hot property, with Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur among those showing interest.

Joining the club on loan initially, it cost Celtic £9million to make the France U21 international's move from Paris Saint-Germain permanent in June 2018. The chance to generate a substantial profit on the Frenchman can't be ignored.

2 Idrissa GUEYE

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN (FRANCE)

Signed in July 2019 from Everton for €32m, the Senegalese international brought stability to the French champions' midfield as he formed a title-winning partnership with Marco Verratti.

Offering athleticism and physicality to a PSG side better known for its flair and creativity, his ball-winning abilities and willingness to drive forward when in possession are key to bringing the best out of those around him.

A winner with Lille in 2011, this was Gueye's second Ligue 1 title, but with him turning 31 in September the capital club could be tempted to cash in on his impressive performances this season, giving him the chance of one last big move.

3 George HORAN

CONNAH'S QUAY NOMADS (WALES)

Having ended The New Saints' run of eight successive league titles, the 38-year-old centre-half can now look forward to leading the Welsh title winners in a first-ever Champions League game.

The Nomads made major headlines in last season's Europa League when they stunned Scottish Premiership side Kilmarnock, recovering from a 2-1 first-leg defeat to win 3-2 on aggregate.

Horan, who works part time as an electrical engineer in Chester, believes the club owes everything to the professional attitude of their manager. "We've come on leaps and bounds since Andy Morrison has come in," he says. "Hopefully there is more to come."

4 Milan BORJAN

RED STAR BELGRADE (SERBIA)

One of seven players to win his third Serbian title in a row, sealing this season's championship was tinged with disappointment for the club's skipper.

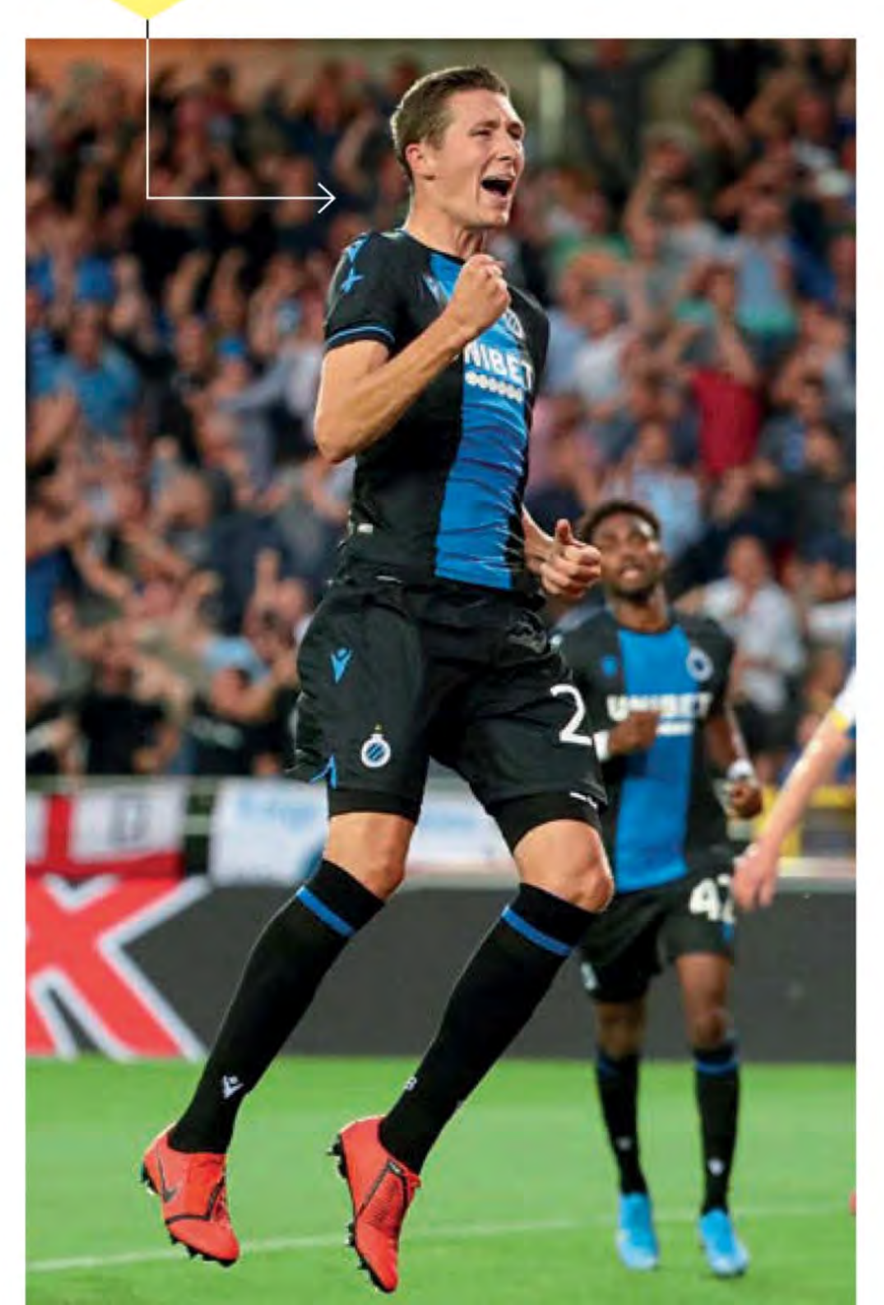
"My only regret is that we couldn't play in front of our phenomenal fans," said Borjan of the empty stands for Red Star's 5-0 victory at Rad.

Having kept clean sheets in half of his SuperLiga appearances this season, the 32-year-old Canadian international keeper played a huge role in his side's record-extending 31st national title.

"By winning the third consecutive title we continued to write history, we showed how big Red Star is. This generation has confirmed its dominance on the field."

5 Hans VANAKEN

CLUB BRUGGE (BELGIUM)



Belgium's Player Of The Season for the previous two campaigns, a change in role saw the midfielder help FCB regain the title they surrendered to Genk last year.

Previously the side's main creative talent, this season Vanaken was granted more freedom to drift in from his station on the left flank by coach Philippe Clement, who arrived last June. The switch saw the 27-year-old's goal output increase to almost one every other game.

Although he rarely misses a game, his phenomenal consistency at club level is yet to win over national coach Roberto Martinez – who, to be fair, has a vast array of creative talent at his disposal.

A starting place in November's dead rubber Euro qualifier against Cyprus was just Vanaken's fourth appearance for the Red Devils.

6 Kristian KEQI

FLORIANA (MALTA)

A hat-trick by the Albanian attacker against third-place Sirens in early March boosted Floriana's dreams of a first championship for 27 years. Two months later, having played no more games, a decision was taken to end the season and the club were crowned champions for a record-equalling 26th time.

The league's top scorer with 14 goals, Keqi joined Floriana last year after playing in Serie C with Arezzo, and a return to Italy could be on the cards for the 23-year-old.

CHEVROLET
adidas
18

SHOOTING STAR

Bruno Fernandes has taken an indirect route to the top, but now he's here to stay

Words: Nick Bidwell

Portuguese midfield ace Bruno Fernandes, already established as a Manchester United talisman after swapping the green-and-white hoops of Sporting CP in Portugal for Old Trafford red in the January transfer window, has been a footballing head-turner for as long as he can remember.

Even as a fresh-faced seven, eight or nine-year-old schoolboy – growing up in the northern town of Maia, some 10km to the north of Porto – his talent attracted admiring glances like moths to a flame, with Porto's two elite teams, FC Porto and Boavista hell-bent on luring him away from mother club, FC Sao Mamede de Infesta.

The odds at the time were heavily stacked in favour of FC Porto. Not only were FCP the bigger, more prestigious outfit – reigning Portuguese champions and en route to their second European Cup – The Dragons also knew that Bruno was a rabid fan of theirs and viscerally inclined to say yes in a hurry. Yet somehow Boavista managed to swing the deal, signing the youngster a couple of months before his 10th birthday in the summer of 2004.

So just what was Boavista's trump card in the battle to bring in Bruno? According to his elder brother Ricardo

Starting out... Fernandes on his second Serie A start for Udinese v Genoa

– the clincher came in the form of a van. "The big stumbling block was that neither my father (Jose) or mother (Virginia) could drive," Ricardo explained to leading Portuguese football website *Maisfutebol*. "It was a major problem to get Bruno to training sessions. Unlike FC Porto, Boavista offered transport. They could pick up and return the kids. That made things so much easier. This is why Bruno opted for Boavista."

All those who knew him at Infesta, a club based in the town of Matosinhos, north-west of Porto, had more than an inkling that the kid was destined to make the pro grade. They loved his extraordinary skill levels – honed in endless games of street football in Maia – gutsy attitude and willingness to work on the weak points of his game.

Sergio Marques, his first coach at Infesta, was a highly influential figure in those early, formative years and, in an interview with the *Publico* newspaper,

Goalscorer...Celebrating a goal against Villarreal in last season's Europa League

spoke about the nuts and bolts of the youngster's soccer apprenticeship. "On Tuesdays, I used to train him on a one-to-one basis," said Marques. "Together we would work on his passing, ball control, possession retention and heading. To start with, he only seemed to want to go forward and keep the ball himself. I soon realised though that he would go far. With the ball at his feet, he would risk everything. He'd be the first to arrive at training, prepared well and was open and communicative with everyone. He had a great shot and has always showed a will-to-win streak."

Young Bruno could be a little hard to handle at times. He could be wilful and undisciplined and was all too ready to stand up for himself. Ricardo

remembers his younger brother giving short shrift to a coach at Infesta who rubbed him up the wrong way. "The coach in question sometimes would point to him and say 'take care, child'," revealed Ricardo in the *Diario de Noticias* newspaper. Bruno would reply: "'If I'm a child, then I don't play'. He gave everything on the pitch. Some referees would ask that he be substituted before he was sent off. He wasn't being nasty. He simply was aggressive in a positive sense.

"Bruno always took part in kick-abouts on the street involving me and my friends. We were all much older than him, but he had no fear. To him, it made no difference how old someone was. Whether they were fat or thin. He's the same today. Nothing scares him."

While a competitive fire has always burned brightly in him, sometimes the lapping flames would force the fire brigade to attend. As a schoolboy or junior, he would often overstep the temperamental mark, reacting badly to adversity and even sparking fights with team-mates on the training ground. It was not uncommon for him to be sent to the dressing room to cool off. Truth to tell, he had too much desire for his own good. Apart from making it big in football, he simply had no future Plan B. The game was his escape route, the sole path to a better life for him and his family. He was obsessed with following

Strike... Celebrating an excellent finish against Roma

Equaliser...Fernandes scores his second Serie A goal for Sampdoria

"He gave everything on the pitch. Some referees would ask that he be substituted before he was sent off."
Ricardo Fernandes

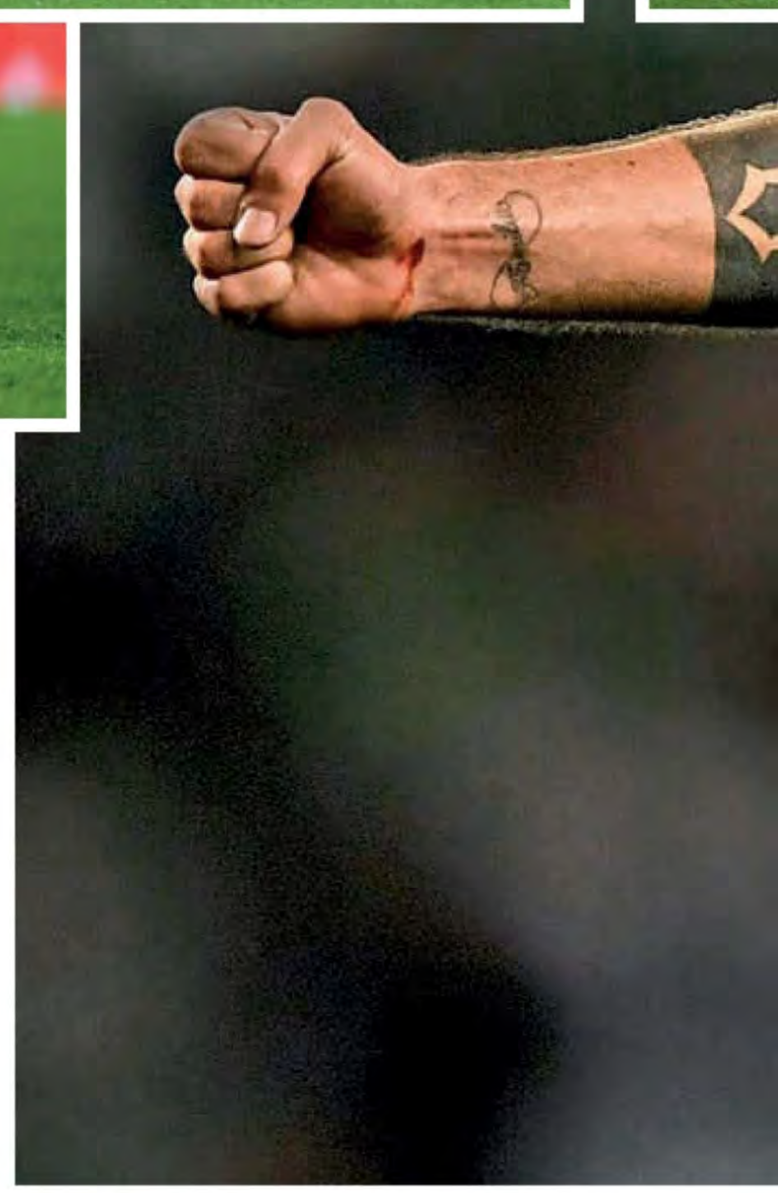
Timeline

NOV 11, 2012
Plays his first senior game in a Serie B clash, coming off the bench for Novara against Cittadella.

NOV 3, 2013
Makes his Serie A debut as a second-half substitute for Udinese in a 3-0 home defeat to Internazionale.

Instant impact...Fernandes has quickly become a key man at Old Trafford

Solo goal...Fernandes opens the scoring in a Europa League tie at Villarreal



> "Everyone there remembers Bruno Fernandes...He was the puny kid who could dribble around the entire world"
>
> **Remulo Marques, ex-Pasteleira vice-president**

in the footsteps of his idols: Brazilian ball-artist Ronaldinho and Portugal's midfield general Joao Moutinho.

Times invariably were hard for the Fernandes clan in Maia. His father's pay packet from his job at a local textile factory barely was enough to cover the bills and home was a cramped apartment on a council estate. Little wonder Bruno emerged as the archetypal hungry and single-minded fighter. He lived for the game and dreamt about it too, according to Ricardo. "We slept in the same bedroom and on the eve of a big match, especially if he was about to face FC Porto, he'd be talking in his sleep: 'Pass, shoot'."

Boavista, a team famous for their black-and-white checked shirts, turned out to be the perfect spot for Bruno to hone his craft. Over the years, the club's academy had churned out an amazing number of Portuguese internationals – including strikers Joao Pinto and Nuno Gomes, full-back Jose Bosingwa, midfielders Raul Meireles and Andre Gomes, and centre-back Ricardo Costa – and the coaching philosophy and guidance there was second to none.

Taking their inspiration from the famous Ajax coaching manual, youth instructors at Boavista placed a premium on nurturing versatility in their academy pupils and very much did so in Bruno's case. Besides operating in more or less every midfield position – out wide, as a No.10 or in a box-to-box role – Fernandes also spent a great deal of playing time in central defence. "Although he hated it on the whole, he did quite like being in a position where he could see the game unfold before him," said Ricardo. "He did have that important ability to read the game. He seemed a good sweeper."

The next module in his football education was a loan spell with the Under-15s and 16s at Pasteleira, a nearby Boavista satellite club. This was a coming of age period for Bruno. Delighted to be restored to an attacking midfield role, his form was consistently brilliant and, as the cherry on the cake, he began to show undeniable leadership qualities.

It was around this time that Fernandes first crossed paths with fellow Premier League midfielder Andre Gomes, and their careers have followed similar trajectories. Both currently feature in midfield for Portugal, both exploded at Boavista as teenagers and both starred for Pasteleira. But for Remulo Marques, a former Pasteleira vice-president and Boavista director of sport, the pair can be easily distinguished. "Curiously not many people at Pasteleira have memories of Andre Gomes, while everyone there remembers Bruno Fernandes," Marques told *Maisfutebol*. "He was the puny kid who could dribble around the entire world and eventually became an outstanding performer."

DEC 7, 2013
Gets his first league goal, in a 3-3 draw at Napoli.

AUG 13, 2016
On the losing side as Portugal exit the Olympic Games quarter-finals to Germany.

AUG 28, 2016
Appears for Sampdoria on loan for the first time, in a 2-1 home win over Atalanta.

SEP 26, 2016
Scores his first goal for Sampdoria, in a 2-1 defeat at Cagliari.

Derby...Keeping the ball from Benfica

Prolific... Fernandes scored 20 league goals last season

At the age of 17, Fernandes looked a sure thing to imminently break into the Boavista first team, so his decision to join Italian second division side Novara for just over €42,000 in the summer of 2012 came totally out of the blue. The man responsible for making it happen was Novara scout Javier Ribalta, an astute Spanish talent spotter, who would later work for Juventus and Manchester United, and now as Zenit's sporting director. Ostensibly in Portugal to run the rule over another young player, Ribalta could not take his eyes off Fernandes and duly convinced Novara general manager Cristiano Giaretta and youth sector chief Mauro Borghetti to recruit him.

Despite a few early bouts of homesickness, Bruno did not take long to make his mark at the Piedmont club. In his first game for the Novara youth team, he scored a memorable goal, jinking past a half-dozen opponents before coolly slotting home. A little later, he was up to his old tricks again, this time in a junior fixture against Sampdoria. The essence of the highlight reel? A cheeky nutmeg en route to an assist. By November, he was a first-teamer, making his debut as a late substitute in a Serie B fixture versus Citadella. His first piece of the action that day has gone down in Novara folklore, demanding the ball from club skipper Andrea Lisuzzo, taking on and beating three defenders and hitting the

International... Fernandes makes his debut v Saudi Arabia

SEP 12, 2017
Having joined Sporting CP, he makes his first appearance in the Champions League group stage, scoring in a 3-2 win at Olympiakos.

NOV 10, 2017
Awarded his first full cap, playing the last 34 minutes of a 3-0 friendly win over Saudi Arabia.

JAN 27, 2018
Wins the Portuguese League Cup as Sporting beat Vitoria Setubal on penalties.

JUN 7, 2018
Scores his first international goal, in a 3-0 win against Algeria.

JUN 15, 2018
Makes his World Cup debut, in a 3-3 draw with Spain.

World Cup... Holding off Spain defender Nacho

Penalty...Scoring his first Premier League goal

bar with a long-range rocket. He was now off and running. Over the course of that rookie season he was quite magnificent, playing a key role as Novara sensationally went from relegation strugglers to play-off participants.

Such was his impact in the Italian second tier, a queue of top-flight clubs began to form, with Udinese proving to be the most persuasive of suitors. He would enjoy three fine seasons at the Stadio Friuli, consistently catching the eye with his speed off the mark, elusiveness on the ball, strong personality and adaptability.

In August 2016, he moved to Sampdoria on a 12-month loan deal and while he did not set the Genoa-based club alight with his goalscoring prowess – netting just five times in 33 Serie A games in 2016-17 – he continued to mature both as a player and a man. The fans at the Stadio Luigi Ferraris adored their No.10 and were bitterly disappointed when the news broke in June 2017 that he was heading back to Portugal, joining Sporting for €8.5million.

Sporting certainly would get their money's worth. Portugal's Player Of The Year in both the 2017-18 and 2018-19 seasons, Fernandes essentially was Mr Sporting, an exceptional mix of wonderful passing range, dynamism, finishing power and role model captaincy. During two-and-a-half seasons in Lisbon, he netted 64 goals in all competitions and provided 52 assists. In the 2018-19 season alone, he racked up no fewer than 33 competitive goals, thus making him the most prolific midfield marksman in a major European league.

He also helped Sporting claim a clutch of prizes (two Portuguese League Cups and the domestic cup). But there would be moments of pain and despair too. Club president, Bruno de Carvalho, angered by the team's failure to qualify for the Champions League and lack of progress in the Europa League, took to aiming verbal volleys at the squad and, in May 2018, the bottom of the barrel was scraped, with irate fans attacking players and trashing the training ground. Fernandes was one of seven players to terminate their own contracts, though he later decided to re-sign. It says much for his professionalism and dedication to the cause that the following season he raised his game to an even higher plane.

He was a boon for Sporting, and Sporting were good for him. While starring in Italy, full international honours remained at a distance, but he immediately earned his call-up papers on returning to the motherland in the summer of 2017, initially deployed as a bench warmer in a number of World Cup 2018 qualifiers, then winning his first cap in a 3-0 friendly win over Saudi Arabia in November 2017. A member of the Portugal squad which competed at the 2018 World Cup finals, he has been an automatic starter for his country for the past year or so, notably contributing to the conquest of the UEFA Nations League title last year.

Cristiano Ronaldo is no longer the only heavyweight in the Portuguese ranks. The slightly-built Fernandes is equally equipped to carry an attacking load.

Irate fans attacked players and trashed the training ground. Fernandes was one of seven players to terminate their own contracts

Heir...Fernandes could be Portugal's next talisman

MAY 25, 2019
Scores his spot-kick as Sporting CP beat Porto on penalties to win the Portuguese Cup.

JUN 9, 2019
Picks up a winners medal as Portugal beat Netherlands 1-0 in the UEFA Nations League Final.

FEB 1, 2020
Makes his Manchester United debut in a goalless draw at home to Wolverhampton Wanderers.

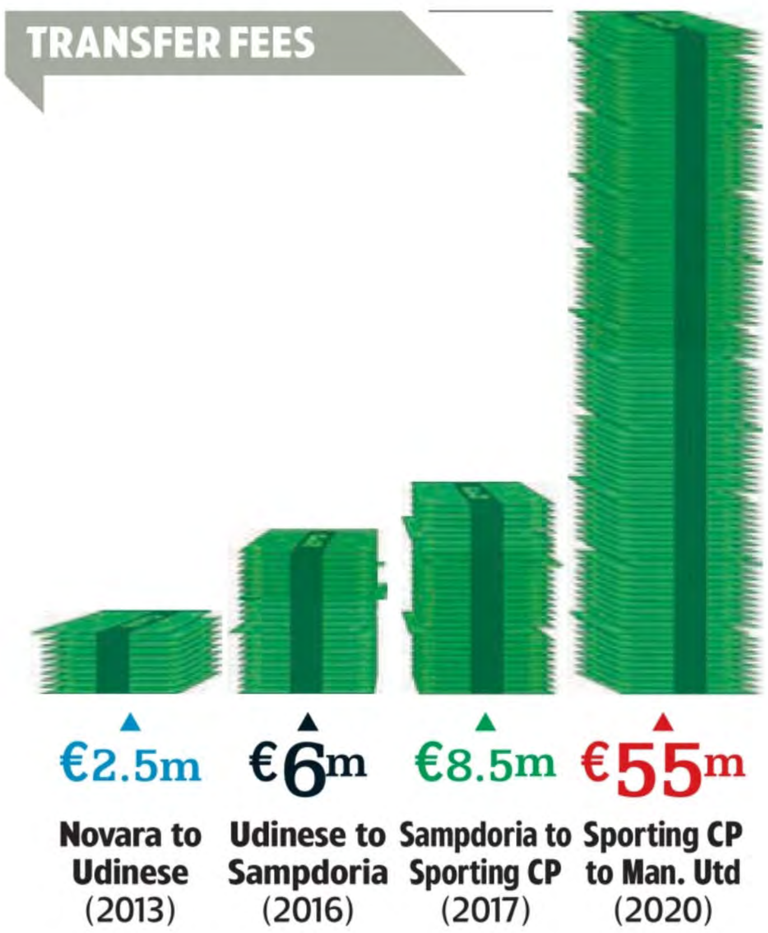
FEB 23, 2020
On target for Manchester United for the first time, in a 3-0 victory over Watford.

MAR 16, 2020
Named Premier League Player Of The Month for February.

Bruno Fernandes

the numbers game

TRANSFER FEES



PRIMEIRA LIGA PLAYER OF THE YEAR

PORTUGAL

19 CAPS

2 GOALS

TOP PORTUGUESE LEAGUE SALES

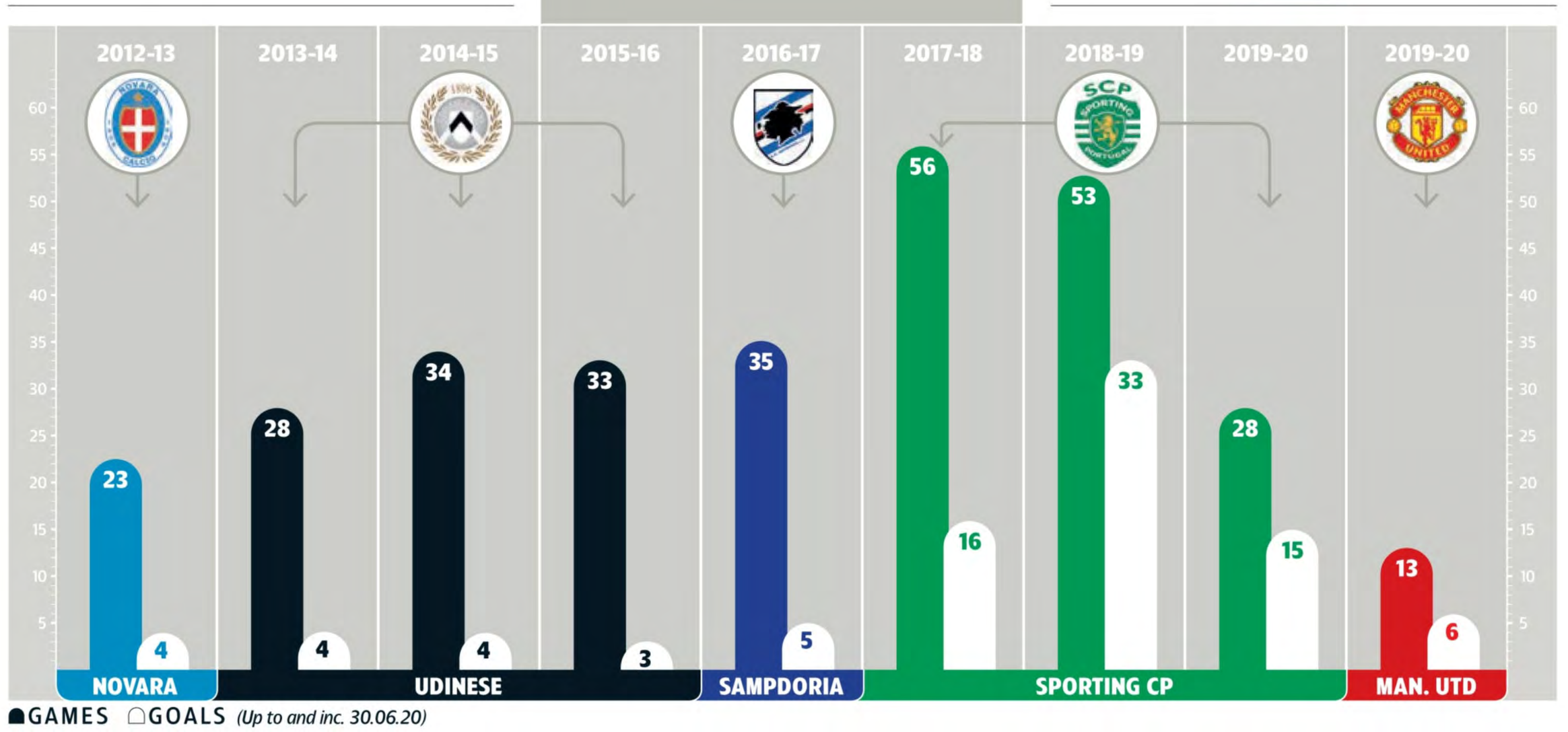
€126m	**JOAO FELIX** (Benfica to Atletico Madrid, 2019)
€55m	**BRUNO FERNANDES** (Sporting CP to Man. United, 2020)
€50m	**EDER MILITAO** (Porto to Real Madrid, 2019)

GOALS 2018-19

33

Goals in 2018-19 made him the highest-scoring midfielder in Europe in a single season

HONOURS



STARTING AGAIN

Football is beginning its journey back to normality

WORDS Keir Radnedge

Heavy flooding is the forecast for 2021. Not from rain but international football. All around the world the domestic game will be struggling to make up for lost time, lost sponsors and lost gate revenue. But in the world according to Gianni Infantino, Aleksander Ceferin and their cohorts, a tsunami of football should follow the earthquake of 2020.

FIFA president Infantino and UEFA supremo Ceferin – along with the heads of the other confederations – were left high and dry by the coronavirus shutdown. They could only watch, wait and issue supportive statements of positivity from their ivory towers.

All the confrontational dilemmas of how to resurrect football belonged to the presidents, chairmen, chief executives and general-secretaries of the national associations, their leagues and their clubs – and none of them dared move without the approval of governments and health advisers. The lie that politics and sport do not mix has been decisively exposed.

Different countries undertook similar emergency action but in varying sequences and time-frames. Football's nations went into lockdown simultaneously but emerged at contrasting speed. That was no help to FIFA, UEFA, Africa's CAF, the Asian region and Oceania, or CONMEBOL and CONCACAF in the Americas. Not that they could do anything but lay down repeatedly revised and delayed deadlines and await a gap in the clouds of crisis.

At some point, international football must swap lockdown for lockstep. That time cannot come soon enough for FIFA and UEFA because next year's schedules will place a heavier burden on players than ever before.

Planning ahead... FIFA president Gianni Infantino

FIFPro, the international players' union, was warning before the pandemic that the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe had hit a glass ceiling in terms of match demand. Prepare for a shattering of that window in 2021 as a super-charged schedule of national-team tournaments and World Cup qualifiers are spread over the top of squashed-up European and South American club competitions. This assumes sufficient airlines are back in business and enough quarantine restrictions have been lifted.

What should have been a "breather year" – a chance to snatch a quick gasp between the European Championship/Copa America and World Cup – has been wiped out. Both have been postponed for a year, from 2020 to 2021, enforcing consequent postponements of the 2021 Nations League and UEFA Under-21 Championship.

The Women's Euros in England was pushed back from 2021 to 2022 to prevent it crashing up against the delayed Olympic Games, where football is more important for the women than the men.

FIFA also called off next year's launch in China of its controversial expanded Club World Cup. No new date has been set but the financial imperative created by the pandemic means the big clubs will be keener than ever to see Infantino's baby take off eventually, perhaps in 2023.

Consider, too, the effect of financial crash on the international transfer market. This is potentially far more damaging to the minnows who depend on it for survival than the giants, even though the latter stand to lose north of £4billion between them even if closed-doors competition proceeds without any more hitches.

THE 2021 CALENDAR

MAY 16: Women's Champions League Final *(Gothenburg)*

MAY 26: Europa League Final *(Seville)*

MAY 29: UEFA Champions League Final *(St. Petersburg)*

JUN 11 – JUL 11: European Championship *(Amsterdam, Baku, Bilbao, Bucharest, Budapest, Copenhagen, Dublin, Glasgow, Munich, Rome, London and St. Petersburg)*

JUN 11 - JUL 11: Copa America *(Colombia and Argentina)*

JUL 2 - 25: CONCACAF Gold Cup *(venue tba)*

JUL 23 – AUG 8: Olympic Games *(Japan)*

NOVEMBER: Copa Libertadores Final, AFC Champions League Final, CAF Champions League Final

DECEMBER: Club World Cup *(China)*

ONGOING: 2022 World Cup qualifiers

Charlie Marshall, CEO of the European Club Association, says: "The complete severing of matchday income is financially devastating for all clubs but particularly those who rely more proportionately on sheer numbers of fans. The more popular clubs across Europe are the main drivers of the transfer market and of collective media rights on which the entire football ecosystem depends. The longer the crisis continues, the less the ability of the so-called bigger clubs to generate their full stack of income and the more serious the knock-on effects of the suffering."

FIFA, UEFA and the rest all envisage their international competitions picking up the thread. But the continuing expansion for financial, promotional and political reasons has complicated the resumption.

UEFA's Nations League is tied into the Euro qualifiers, creating a dog's dinner of the play-offs. Similarly, the Asian confederation tied its World Cup qualifying into preliminaries for the Asian Cup.

Common sense suggests the next revision of the international calendar should see a "conscious uncoupling" of competitions. The one should not be dependent on another.

> What should have been a "breather year" - a chance to snatch a quick gasp between the European Championship/Copa America and World Cup - has been wiped out

And it is not only senior competition that is affected. Halting the various European, American, Asian and African youth championships forced FIFA to push back all the finals tournaments for which the regional events serve as qualifying rounds.

The shape and sound of next year's football remains in question and the whole match experience will be complicated by temperature testing, social distancing and attendance restrictions – even where closed-doors requirements are relaxed. Far better to stay home; the prospect for armchair TV fans is overwhelming.

This is all predicated on assumptions that broadcasters will continue stumping up cash, albeit reduced by a slump in advertising revenue; that FAs and leagues will prop up the grass-roots game; and that red tape will not delay emergency grants from FIFA and UEFA – though how they stop money ending up in the wrong pockets is another matter.

Optimism will reign – unless, of course, a second wave of coronavirus raises its ugly head. Then all bets are off.

France

WORDS Howard Johnson

French prime minister Edouard Philippe announced in parliament on April 28 that all professional sport in the country for the 2019-20 season – and specifically professional football – would not be allowed to start up again. The decision was taken "to give clarity", but the clarity it gave was not to everyone's liking.

Two days after Philippe's decree, the board of directors of France's professional football leagues announced their acceptance of the government's decision and confirmed that the final league tables would remain as they stood when the coronavirus brought things to a grinding halt after a round of matches on the weekend of March 7-8.

All but two of Ligue 1's 20 clubs – Paris Saint-Germain and Strasbourg – had played 28 matches. These two clubs had completed one game less, but the final table was decided on a ratio of number of points won against games played. And so PSG, ahead of the pack by 12 points when everything stopped, were awarded the ninth top-flight title of their history, as well as access to next season's Champions League. Marseille were handed second place and Champions League football, while third-placed Rennes will compete in the qualifying round of the same tournament. Fourth-placed Lille qualified for the Europa League.

Both the French Cup and French League Cup semi-finals had already been played by the time the curtain came down. PSG were in both finals, and due to meet Saint-Etienne in the Coupe de France and Lyon in the Coupe de la Ligue. The decision was made to attempt to play these matches behind closed doors on July 24 and 31 respectively, with Ligue 1's 2020-21 season, again without spectators initially, planned to start on August 22. If PSG don't win these two finals, then France's two remaining Europa League places will go to Saint-Etienne and Lyon. If they do, or if for some reason the finals don't take place, then fifth-placed Nice and sixth-placed Reims will qualify for the Europa League.

It was also decided that there would be a simple "two up, two down" promotion and relegation system to avoid any complicated issues with play-offs for a third slot, as usually happens in France. The winners in this case were Nimes, who escaped the drop, while Ligue 2's third-placed side,

Behind the mask...Lyon coach Rudi Garcia takes training

Outspoken...Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas

AC Ajaccio, missed out on promotion.

Unsurprisingly, reactions to the decisions taken depended on whether clubs could regard themselves as winners or losers in the shake-up. PSG president Nasser Al Khelaifi said: "We understand, respect and support the decisions taken." Rennes president Nicolas Holveck, meanwhile, called the decision "the least unfair", while acknowledging that "if other people want to challenge it, then that's their right." Those who had the most to gain by doing so were Lyon, who ended up in seventh place, just outside the European qualifying slots, and relegated Toulouse and Amiens.

Lyon's notoriously punchy president Jean-Michel Aulas said: "We feel that the league acted too hastily in bringing the season to a close. We'll be seeking damages of tens of millions of euros." Toulouse president Olivier Sadran also threatened legal action, saying that the decision to end the season this way was "unjust, inequitable and with no foundation in law." Amiens president Bernard Joannin, meanwhile, went a step further, taking his arguments to court in Paris and claiming that such decisions could not be taken with 26 per cent of the season's matches still unplayed. "It's not about money, it's about sporting integrity," he insisted. Joannin suggested that both Amiens and Toulouse should retain their top-flight status next season, and that the top two sides in Ligue 2, Lorient and Lens, should be promoted into a 22-team Ligue 1. Four clubs would then be relegated at the end of the 2020-21 campaign.

With around €240million missing from their coffers, French clubs will definitely be feeling the pinch when 2020-21 finally gets underway

For his part, Aulas was in favour of finishing this season, utilising a play-off system comprising the first 15 teams in Ligue 1, and had even garnered some limited support in the French parliament from Lyon-based politicians. Given that this raised the possibility of 15th-placed Metz becoming champions over a series of just five matches, there really wasn't much enthusiasm for this notion.

The highest court in the land eventually heard the case in early June and a ruling came down that Lyon's proposal was without merit, but the relegation of Toulouse and Amiens was "suspended". This was not the end of the matter, though. The courts asked the Ligue 1 administrators to "re-examine" the situation. But given an AGM was held on May 20, where it was decided that the top flight could accommodate either 18 or 20 clubs, but not 22, it was no surprise that on June 27, clubs voted for a 20-team division – confirmed by the French football federation.

At least Lyon still have one way of qualifying for next season's Champions League – by winning this season's Champions League. They lead Juventus 1-0 after the first leg of the round of 16 thanks to a goal from Lucas Tousart, with the second leg scheduled for August 7. If they progress, they will head to Lisbon for the quarter-finals, where all remaining matches will be played.

One interesting side story in France is what effect the coronavirus disruptions will have on the country's football TV rights. Prior to the shutdown, a new player emerged on the scene as *Mediapro* outmuscled traditional broadcasters *Canal+* and *beIN SPORTS* to grab the lion's share of live broadcasts of both Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 matches over the next four years. With the two main players coming to the end of their rights tenure, neither *Canal* nor *beIN* were in any mood to make major compromises when negotiating with the leagues about what to do with monies not paid for matches not played. So with around €240million missing from their coffers one thing is certain: French clubs will definitely be feeling the pinch when the 2020-21 season finally gets underway.

Appeal...Amiens president Bernard Joannin

Italy

With the mid-June restart of football, Italy has just set out on a post-COVID voyage into a "no man's land" where there are no maps and no certainties, especially with regard to the 2020-21 season.

Italy, which experienced a strict three-month lockdown and the loss of 34,000 people during the COVID-19 pandemic, is bracing itself for a crisis that will see a 9.5 per cent drop in GDP in an already struggling economy.

TV rights, player contracts, sponsorship deals, spectator attendances, championship dates and much else besides all represent huge question marks in this post-COVID landscape. Just about everybody seems to agree that nothing will be the same next season. For example, asked about this summer's transfer market, Juventus managing director Fabio Paratici said: "We're obviously going to have to be more flexible and more creative."

This means that in a situation where, for a vast majority of clubs, revenue has simply gone down the drain – be it TV rights, box-office takings or transfer deals – clubs will have to look to swap deals, loan deals, player salary cuts and, above all, to their youth programmes to stay both competitive and afloat.

The big names in Italian football – Juventus, Milan, Inter, Lazio, Roma, Napoli and Fiorentina, to name the most obvious – have the financial backing to survive this difficult moment. Yet for just about every other club in the land it may be difficult. Daniele Sebastiani, a man who in 2009 put together a consortium to save bankruptcy-threatened Serie B side Pescara, puts it this way: "Post-COVID-19 football will be different from what we have known until now. The gap between rich clubs and the not-so-rich ones will just get wider...In future, Serie A clubs are going to have to help Serie B clubs, perhaps by not only loaning them players but also by paying those players' salaries."

The independent Switzerland-based CIES Football Observatory makes the

Calcio returns...Juventus take on Milan in the Coppa Italia

WORDS Paddy Agnew

same point, underlining that the reduction of business income at the top will make itself felt all the way down to the lower levels of Italian football, commenting in a recent report: "The clubs are simply going to run out of money during this summer's transfer market. Deals will be done but they will be cut-price deals and that trend will affect player transfers all the way down to the lower divisions."

Smaller clubs, amateur clubs or indeed Serie A clubs such as Atalanta and Udinese – who rely not on the backing of an industrial powerhouse but rather on selling either home-grown or cheaply purchased talents to keep their books balanced – are going to have their style greatly cramped. There are many examples of this type of business but Atalanta's sale last January of their talented Sweden winger Dejan Kulusevski, currently on loan at Parma, makes the point.

Last of his kind... Dejan Kulusevski's €35million move could be Italy's biggest transfer for some time

Atalanta had picked up the Swedish-born player of Macedonian descent as a 16-year-old in 2016 for €100,000. They sold him to Juventus for €35million. That sort of money will not be around this summer.

Not everyone, however, sees the possible changes up ahead as an entirely bad thing. Commentator Fabio Ravezzani of *Telelombardia* recently observed: "At this point we need to rein in certain excesses in our society. Starting with the world of football, we need a levelling off, a reduction of its huge income and inevitably also of its mad spending. Nobody will die of hunger because of this, indeed many will come back down to Earth."

Mauro Lucarini, director general of Serie B side Perugia, even sees this as an "opportunity", a moment when clubs will be forced to concentrate on their own youth teams. Furthermore, he sees the whole vast jungle of private football "schools" for children which feed into professional football being "rationalised" in times when cash is scarce.

It is also true that the post-COVID crisis in Italy will not only increase the gap between rich and poor clubs but also between economically secure players in big Serie A clubs – probably about 1 per cent of all players – and everyone else. Even before COVID, many players in the lower divisions, in particular in Serie C, regularly found themselves without a salary as their clubs struggled. Inevitably, we can expect more of the same.

So, in conclusion, the immediate Italian future may well be one dominated by loans, swaps, youth-team programmes and, regrettably, possible club closures. In the absence of hard cash, it could be very tough.

Clubs will have to look to swap deals, loan deals, player salary cuts and, above all, to their youth programmes

Lockdown...Gianluigi Buffon arrives for training

Spain

A football agent based in Madrid says there's one thing that's guaranteed to get a giggle out of him, even during lockdown. Every morning he picks up the papers and almost without fail there on the cover, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, is another name. Neymar, Haaland, Pogba, Lautaro and the rest. Another big, bombastic summer signing supposedly on his way to Real Madrid or Barcelona.

"It's silly anyway a lot of the time," the agent says, and now it reaches a whole new level. One front page ran the headline "*Super Mercado*" when there is no market; hardly anyone is doing deals at the moment and even once the season finishes they might still not. Clubs are only just beginning to calculate the impact of the coronavirus crisis and they do so without all the variables. But they already know one thing: when it comes to signing footballers, there might be no money to buy them with.

The 2019-20 season should have finished by now. Instead it restarted on June 11 and it was a success to get that far, that soon. Next season might, just might, begin on September 12 with 30 per cent capacity inside stadiums. It is likely to be 2021 before they're full again, if they get there. And that brings consequences. Exactly what, though, no one is sure yet.

Of Spain's 42 first and second-division clubs, only a tiny handful have not imposed pay cuts or unilaterally applied ERTEs – a government scheme to temporarily reduce salaries by up to 70 per cent. The league itself encouraged every club to do so, seeking ways of saving money. At Real Madrid, players took cuts of almost 20 per cent. The figures at Atletico Madrid were similar. At Barcelona, division over how to deal with the financial implications of the virus lead to another public conflict between players and the board.

Barcelona were the first to act, in part because they were the first to be hit. "This is an exceptional situation," said the president Josep Maria Bartomeu. In part it was so damaging because their economic situation was precarious anyway, but no one could have foreseen this and the impact was immediate. It was also enormous.

Bartomeu reckoned that Barcelona had lost €6million just with the postponement of the Champions League game with Napoli. The club shop was closed and so was the Camp Nou museum. At almost 2,500 visitors a day, only three museums in the whole country attract more people, with some calculations suggesting that it could have lost almost €1m in the first fortnight alone. Behind Barcelona's museum comes Real Madrid's, the country's fifth-most popular, estimated by *ABC* newspaper to bring in €1.41m a month.

Real Madrid generate match-day revenue of roughly €4.4m per game, Barcelona make over €2m per league game, and at Atletico Madrid that figure is close to €1.4m. Their stadiums have stood empty for 12 weeks already – and this is just the start.

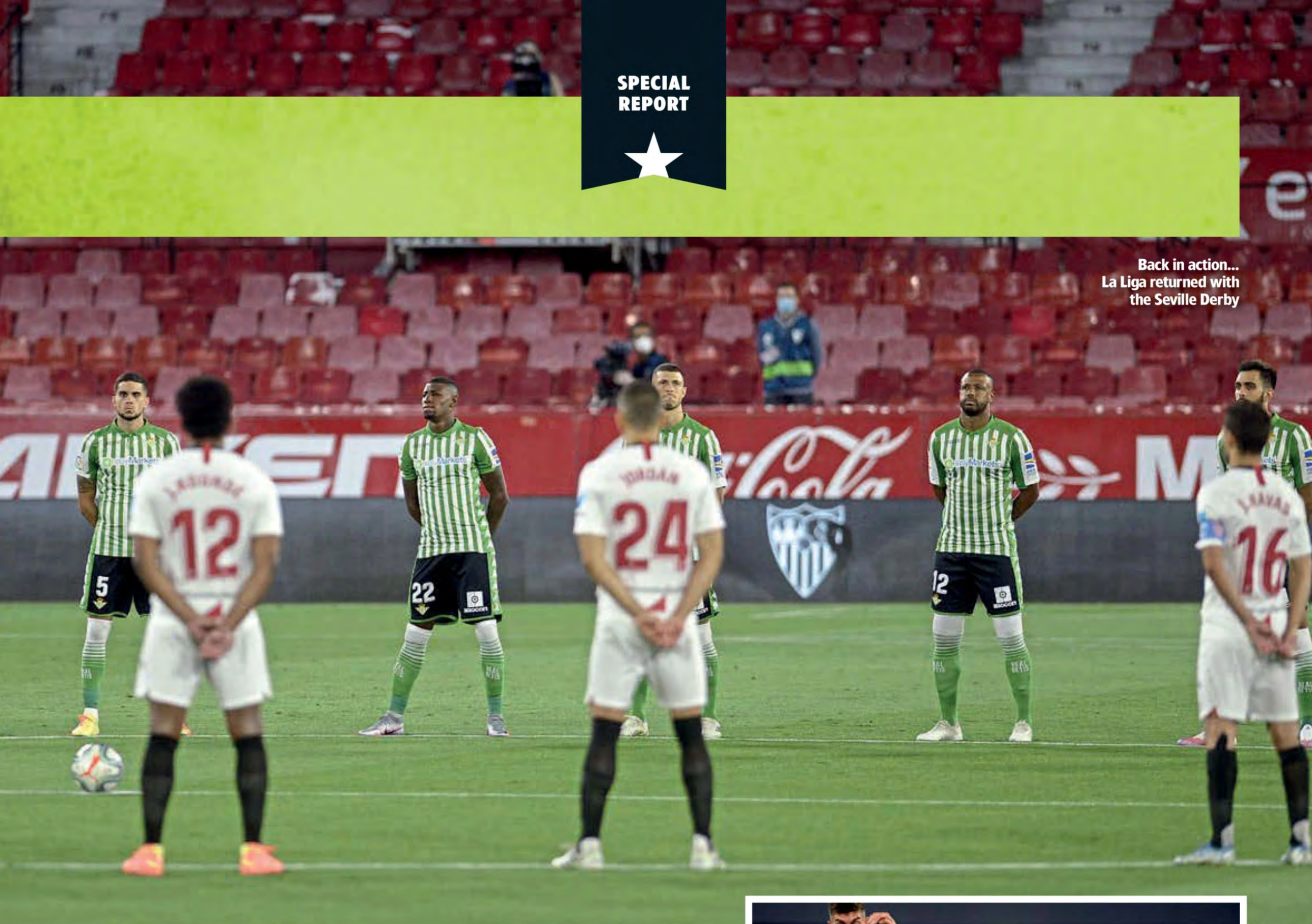
Across the country, clubs are wrestling with what to do about season-ticket holders. Leganes and Getafe will return 20 per cent of this season's costs and let them have next year's for free, but not every club has offered refunds. Refunds cost money and some believe that they cannot afford to offer them. Madrid and Barcelona are among those yet to announce plans – and there is a reason for that.

When the crisis first broke, the president of the league, Javier Tebas, estimated that Spanish football stood to lose €1billion in the event of the season not being completed and €350m if it is completed behind closed doors. That latter option is now on track, protecting TV revenue, all of which is expected to be paid out. Most of it already has been, in fact. And it has been spent, too. It is a relief that it did not need to be refunded.

In recent years the gap between the TV money of the teams at the top and those at the bottom has closed: the ratio is now 3.7 to 1. Still too big, but far smaller than it once was. The real differentials come elsewhere. And because the TV money has been protected and match-day revenue hasn't, the impact is uneven. Unexpectedly, perhaps, it is the biggest clubs that take the biggest hit, both as an absolute figure and a percentage of their budget.

Taking precautions... a ball is disinfected at Rayo Vallecano v Albacete

WORDS Sid Lowe



Back in action... La Liga returned with the Seville Derby

For example, La Liga TV revenue makes up 88 per cent of Leganes' income, while less than 4 per cent comes from season-ticket sales. At Real Madrid, only 21 per cent comes from La Liga TV revenue, while 18 per cent is generated on match days. All of which is a good thing: the bigger clubs are also, after all, the clubs that can best withstand the impact in the mid- to long-term, finding ways of generating revenue after the crisis.

Financial controls, forced through by La Liga, have given clubs greater stability than they had before. Players going unpaid is a thing of the past. The blow has been serious but not fatal yet. With the exception of Malaga, a club in crisis and administration at the foot of the second division, the Spanish league does not expect anyone to go out of business.

From the Segunda B division downwards, which depends on the federation rather than the league, there are greater concerns, but so far those teams too have resisted, even with competition cancelled.

And yet the true impact of this crisis is yet to be measured. Those league figures were largely based on a simple equation, a portrait painted with broad brush strokes.

La Liga has successfully returned, driven by the determined, bullish president Tebas. Deals have been struck at governmental and federation level, promises of cooperation secured. Those deals weren't always cheap – the league committed a combined total of almost €50m to the sports ministry and the federation – but they were necessary. As Tebas keeps saying, football is an industry that accounts for 1.37 per cent of Spain's GDP. By getting games back, and back on TV, the clubs' most significant source of income has been maintained, the industry propped up.

But they know that battle is only part of the fight they have on their hands. Just like the rest of Europe, sponsorship and advertising are likely to drop off. One study suggested that the Spanish league would suffer a devaluation of 29 per cent. Cash flow comes to a halt. Forget the old clichés: there is no "transfer war chest" here, making those front pages even more out of place. Every team will tighten its belt. At the moment, most are just waiting to see how the new normal looks.

> La Liga has successfully returned, driven by the determined, bullish president Javier Tebas

Going nowhere... Lautaro Martinez's expected move to Barcelona is on hold for now

Tebas told clubs that now was the time for them to recall players on loan and turn to their youth systems. Jaume Roures, the man who owns TV rights holder *Mediapro*, arguably the most powerful man in Spanish football, told *El Mundo*: "It is going to change. Not because the directors change their ideas but because there is no money to spend...it's impossible that there will be €100m, €150m signings."

As Lionel Messi has said: "Football, like life in general, won't be the same."

"Ronaldinho used to try things that no one else would try. That made me like him a lot"

The England winger on his football heroes, life in Germany and leaving home at an early age to fulfil his potential

What has it been like for a young Englishman living and playing in Germany?
From a young age I was used to moving away from home, so that's what made me take that a step further, to move outside of England. It helped that I had moved before. With stuff like seeing friends – obviously I can't just go down the road to see them anymore. And leaving my mum behind and my sisters – I miss them a lot. It's very tough because moving from home is not easy, especially moving away from your mum. But being a professional footballer is what I want to do for the long term, so I had to do what I needed to do to be successful and what's best for me and my career.

What's the best thing about living in Germany?
I'm a London boy and it is not quiet at all in London – there is a lot of noise. Whereas in Germany I can come back from training and just chill in my own space or in my apartment with my dad, and that's nice. I like it quiet. Off the pitch I like to play PlayStation with a couple of friends or just chill or watch something on YouTube. I'm relaxed. But I like it a lot here. The culture is different. Obviously the fans have so much passion for the game, so it's a dream come true to play for them. The food's alright too – schnitzel is really nice!

You were handed the No.7 shirt, which had been worn previously by Ousmane Dembele, when you first signed for Borussia Dortmund. You must have realised at that point that the club were very serious about you?
I was kind of surprised when they offered Dembele's shirt to me, but then I realised, 'Why not?', you know? I believe in myself, so why not?

When you moved to Germany, did you think you were taking a bit of a gamble?
I believed in myself, so the idea of that didn't really faze me. I was moving to Germany and that was that. Obviously I wouldn't just tell somebody to move because not everyone is comfortable moving away from home but if you feel that you are ready to play abroad, and you believe in yourself that you would do well, then I'd say, 'Why not?' I would definitely recommend it, from my experience.

As a young player with enormous talent, how important is it to be playing regularly at the highest possible level?
I think it's totally vital because not everyone wants to play at Under-23 level in England. Everyone feels they're ready for the next step, but the timing must be whatever you feel is right for you. For some people it's right to move to a new club, for others it's right to stay and fight for a position. Everyone has a right to do what they want to do. I just felt it was right to go to Dortmund. ➤

BVB 09
evonik
GUE

How is your German coming along?
Yeah, it's going alright. Learning German is a bit difficult, but I've got a few words. I've still got a long way to go, *danke schon!*

Who were your footballing heroes growing up?
My dad was a big fan of John Barnes. He had a couple of videos of him at home and I used to watch them a lot. I used to look at Ronaldinho on YouTube. That was a big thing for me. I liked how he used to carry his team sometimes with his performances. He used to try things that no one else would try and that made me like him a lot. I didn't have a team that I supported, though. I just idolised a lot of great players.

How would you describe your style?
I'd say I'm a bit tricky, direct and obviously confident. I believe in myself in one-v-one situations. That sums me up, really. I just want to try to be the best that I can be. I want to keep working hard and never give up.

> "When I was a young kid I always dreamed of playing for my country. It's the biggest thing that could ever happen to a young kid like me"

Your first England call-up was back in 2018 – how did you find out about it, and how did it feel to be a senior England international before your 19th birthday?
I was just grateful that Gareth Southgate had seen my progress in the Bundesliga. I'm really thankful. I was at training when I first got the call, and straightaway I told my parents. They were delighted for me, and I couldn't stop smiling for the whole day! It meant a lot to me, and especially to my family because when I was a young kid I always dreamed of playing for my country. It's the biggest thing that could ever happen to a young kid like me, so I am really grateful for the opportunity to play for England.

England hero...the winger opened his international account in September

What are your memories of the England Under-17 victory at the 2017 World Cup?
The England Under-17s were a very special group. All of us had a great bond within the team when we were in India. After the Under-17 Euros earlier that year, when we got so close and lost on penalties to Spain in the final, the World Cup was a tournament where we thought we could actually win. For the Euros we didn't think that. We didn't know how great we were as a team, but reaching that final and getting so close made us realise we had something special. If we kept on working hard, we knew we could go all the way – and the team did.

You were called back by Dortmund and had to miss the knockout stage. Was that tough?
My feelings were mixed. I didn't really want to leave the England squad at the time, but obviously my club really needed me and I was happy that my manager really wanted me back to play. It was a bit difficult, but the boys brought the trophy home, so it was alright! I watched the final over a live stream on the internet, and I also got given a winners' medal

Flying high...Sancho has double figures for Bundesliga goals and assists for the second season in a row

Surrounded...Sancho came off the bench in Dortmund's 1-0 defeat to Bayern Munich in May

keep up the hard work and we'll see what happens from this point onwards. Again, just believing in myself, training hard every day and getting my opportunity on the pitch – hopefully I can show the world what I can do. People are taking notice, so I am grateful.

There is a lot of talk about you coming back to the Premier League. A £100million fee has been mentioned, with Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool all linked. How does that feel?

I don't know what to say to that. It's hard to say. That's the future. You never know what could happen, so we will wait and see.

Interview by Matt Read

later. It's the best thing that has happened to me during my England career so far.

Do you feel there are many more players who can step up to the seniors from that age group?

Yeah, the growth in England at the moment is crazy. There is a lot of great young players out there. I think that is because they are just so determined to play and play in front of the world, from watching their idols play. The Champions League is the biggest stage in the world and I'm just grateful that I'm living that dream. I just hope that the other young players fulfil their potential and play there too.

What has Gareth Southgate said to you about continuing to progress for the senior side?

Obviously he congratulated me after I first joined the squad. He's said he thinks I've been playing well in the Bundesliga and he felt that playing in the Champions League was a big thing for me, and he was pleased that I managed it well on and off the pitch. He said to

Hot property... the wonderkid can expect plenty more questions about his future

Words Jamie Evans

Rabbi MATONDO

Schalke

In a sentence

"The new Jadon Sancho": just like the Borussia Dortmund star, Matondo is an exciting young winger that walked away from Manchester City to join a Bundesliga club.

What they say

Wales manager and former winger, Ryan Giggs: "He is a talent. If he is half as successful as Sancho has been so far, I'll be happy. He has electrifying pace, and that always keeps you interested."

Former Schalke boss Domenico Tedesco: "He has huge potential. He's extremely quick and good technically, but we mustn't forget he's still very young. We'll give him the time he needs to find his feet in the Bundesliga."

The story so far

Born in Liverpool, Matondo moved to Cardiff at an early age, giving him the option to play international football for England or Wales. His decision was clear though, telling *Wales Online* in 2018: "I feel Welsh. I'm really happy and honoured to say that." His career began in the Welsh capital, joining Cardiff City's academy, before Man. City snapped him up as a 16-year-old.

Although he was highly regarded in Manchester, Matondo was restricted to the youth teams, with his first taste of senior football coming against Rotherham in the EFL Trophy for the Under-21s. In November 2018, he made his senior international debut, coming on as a substitute in Wales' 1-0 defeat to Albania. Two months later, Schalke won the race to sign him in a deal worth £11.25million.

In his first campaign he made seven appearances, mostly as a substitute, then watched on from the bench as his former side beat Schalke twice over two legs in the Champions League last 16. Although he's still awaiting his first appearance in the competition, he has been a regular contributor in the league.

He scored his first goal in German football with a cool finish as Schalke inflicted RB Leipzig's first home defeat of the season, while only two teenagers played more Bundesliga minutes before the league was postponed. When the league resumed, he faced Sancho in the *Revierderby*, coming on as a half-time substitute in Dortmund's 4-0 victory.

Rabbi still has some catching up to do on his former academy team-mate, but he has the potential to make a similar impact.

> "If he is half as successful as Sancho has been so far, I'll be happy"
> Ryan Giggs, Wales manager

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MATONDO

- Matondo's father, Dada, played for a number of clubs in his native DR Congo, while his two brothers, Cedrick and Japhet, have both represented Cardiff's academy.
- At Man. City, he was once clocked running 20 metres in just 2.62 seconds – beating the likes of Kyle Walker, Raheem Sterling and Leroy Sane.
- Like his international coach Ryan Giggs, Matondo appeared for England's schoolboy teams as a youngster, before declaring his allegiance to Wales.

The next step

Unlike Sancho, City negotiated a buy-back option in the deal to sell Matondo, so could return to Manchester in the future for a fee of £60m. Before he reaches that valuation however, he will have to establish himself as a regular starter and goalscorer for both club and country.

Strengths

Matondo bears a striking resemblance to Sancho when running with the ball, possessing the same pace, skill and rapid change of direction.

Weaknesses

The winger's first 24 Bundesliga games produced one goal and zero assists, so he needs to add more end product to his game.

Jonathan PANZO

Monaco
The ex-Chelsea defender was a World Cup winner with the England U17s before joining Monaco in 2018. His career really took off last August when, in the space of three weeks, he'd made his Ligue 1 debut, England U21s debut, and joined Cercle Brugge on loan. He was a regular as the Belgian side staved off relegation.

Ademola LOOKMAN

RB Leipzig
Lookman's first taste of the Bundesliga was in 2018, when he scored five goals in 11 matches on loan at Leipzig. He returned the following year and, although he failed to pick up where he left off, is still a key part of RB's squad. His pace and dynamism will put him in pole position to replace Timo Werner.

Marcus EDWARDS

Vitoria Guimaraes
Mauricio Pochettino once likened him to Messi, but Edwards' best moment in North London came after leaving Tottenham. His goal against Arsenal in the Europa League was one of six he scored before lockdown, with the dainty winger finding a more natural home in Portugal.

Noni MADUEKE

Juventus
The attacking midfielder turned down an offer from Man. United, as well as previous club Tottenham, before joining PSV. He's poised to make a big impact when Dutch football resumes, having scored ten goals for the reserve and youth teams in 2019-20, and making his first Eredivisie start in the final game of the season.

Stephy MAVIDIDI

Montpellier
Mavididi was one of several young players to leave Arsenal's academy for Europe in the last two years, alongside Xavier Amaechi, Jeff Reine-Adelaide and Chuba Akpom. After signing for Juventus and making his debut in April 2019, he impressed with five goals on loan at Ligue 1 strugglers Dijon in 2019-20, which led to a £5.7million switch to Montpellier in July.

Ronaldo VIEIRA

Sampdoria
Vieira was the second-most celebrated Ronaldo to join Serie A when he left Leeds United for £6.5million in 2018. The England U21 international was signed to replace Lucas Torreira after winning two Toulon Tournaments, and the combative midfielder has established himself as a regular for Sampdoria.

Arvin APPIAH

Almeria
Moving from the English Championship to Spain's second tier is far from a well-trodden path for England youth stars, but that didn't stop Appiah leaving Nottingham Forest for Almeria at the start of the 2019-20 season. The Andalusian side were facing the prospect of a play-off spot before the league was postponed, so the pacy winger has a good chance of playing in La Liga in the very near future.

Reece OXFORD

Augsburg
Oxford is yet to reach the potential that he promised as a 16-year-old debutant, when he helped West Ham win at Arsenal. He played just seven more Premier League games before joining Augsburg last summer, following two spells with Borussia Monchengladbach, and is convinced that the Bundesliga is the best place for his development.

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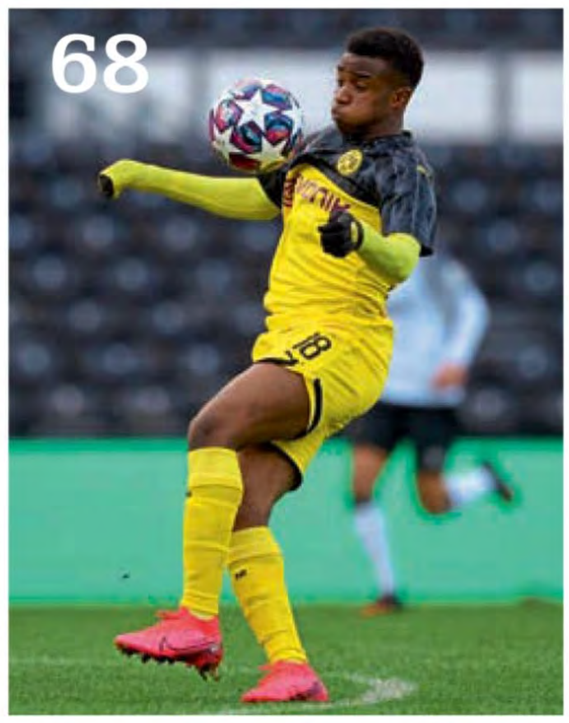
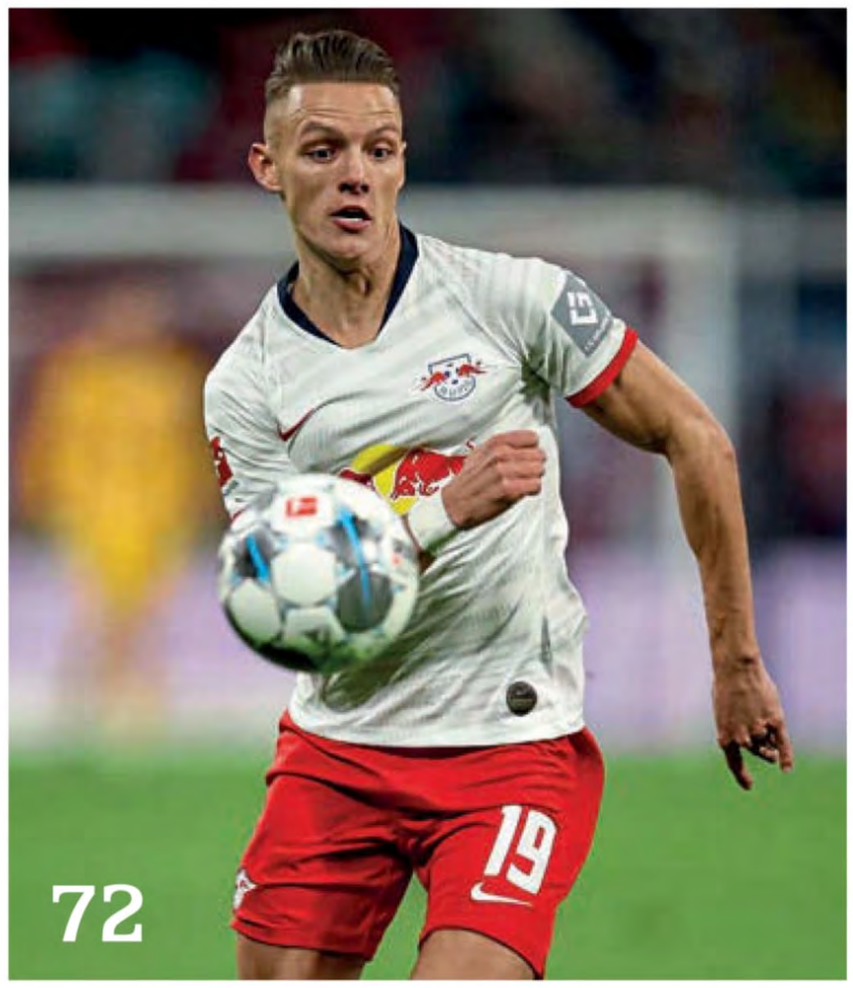




As football begins its slow return to action following the COVID-19 pandemic, the game is already undergoing great change in these unprecedented times.

How long empty stadiums and hygiene protocols remain the new normal is unclear, but one thing that seems certain is the usual round of big-money summer signings will be on hold ahead of next season. And that situation will open the door for a host of young and fresh talents to be handed their opportunity ahead of schedule.

These are some of those set to flourish as football hits the reset button...

The most exciting young talents in England

BILLY GILMOUR

(Chelsea)

A ban on incoming transfers last summer meant Chelsea boss Frank Lampard had little option but to give youth a chance at Stamford Bridge, with Tammy Abraham and Mason Mount in particular making the most of the opportunity.

But even though that suspension was lifted in January, it hasn't stopped Billy Gilmour from following in their footsteps, with the 18-year-old Scottish midfielder added to the Blues first-team squad on a permanent basis in February.

After two brief substitute appearances, he made his first Premier League start against Everton in March and drew rave reviews with a man-of-the-match performance in Chelsea's 4-0 victory.

Among those to sit up and take note was former Manchester United skipper Roy Keane, who told Sky Sports: "He was fantastic. I was sitting in front of the TV having a cup of tea with a bit of chocolate in front of me. I didn't have the volume on but as the game started I literally got out of my seat – which I very rarely do. I thought: 'Who is this kid in midfield?'

"There are certain traits you want in a midfielder: quality on the ball, football intelligence, composure. He had everything.

"It was one of the best performances I have seen in a long, long time. It was just his general play. He was like a world-class player. That's what he looked like straightaway."

> "He was like a world-class player. That's what he looked like straightaway"
>
> **Roy Keane**

Lampard had stressed the decision to blood the youngster against Everton was based on merit, explaining: "He deserves to play. We have got injuries and suspension in the same area but I don't want that to be the reason Billy is playing. He's playing because he has trained well all season."

The teenager's stunning arrival on the big stage will have come as little surprise to those who worked with him in Scotland. Training with Rangers' first team at the age of 15, they were desperate to hold on to their protégé, but when Chelsea turned up with a £500,000 bid in May 2017, Gilmour headed south.

Going forward, Lampard says: "It's been a great start. I'm not too worried about him because I know what he's like as a boy. He's a good one. He'll know the right things and has a big future."

Nich Hills

BUKAYO SAKA

(Arsenal)
The 18-year-old winger's progress this season has been one of the highlights of a disappointing campaign for the Gunners. Although he has mostly played out of position at left-back following injuries to Kieran Tierney and Sead Kolasinac, he's been one of Arsenal's most creative players.

CURTIS JONES

(Liverpool)
The locally-born midfielder's career path is on a swift upward trajectory. He followed up his winning goal in this year's FA Cup third round against neighbours Everton by becoming the youngest player to captain Liverpool, at 19 years and five days old, in the next round.

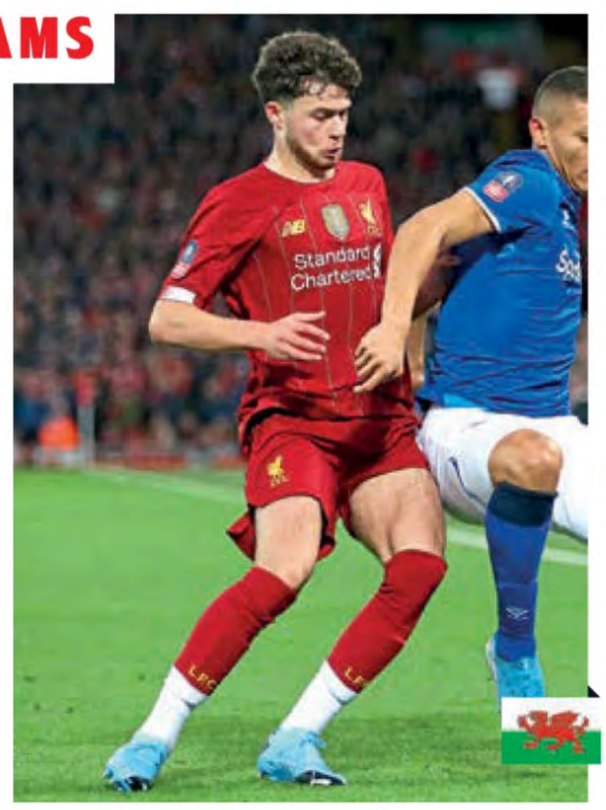
LLOYD KELLY

(Bournemouth)
Signed from Bristol City for £13million in May last year, ankle and thigh problems meant the England U21 star had to wait until June for his league debut, but his strength of character left manager Eddie Howe believing he has "real potential to go right to the top".

PEDRO NETO

(Wolverhampton Wanderers)
One of the growing Portuguese contingent at Wolves, the attacker adapted quickly to English football after arriving from Braga last summer and his ability to influence matters from the bench will help push his case for a more regular starting place.

NECO WILLIAMS

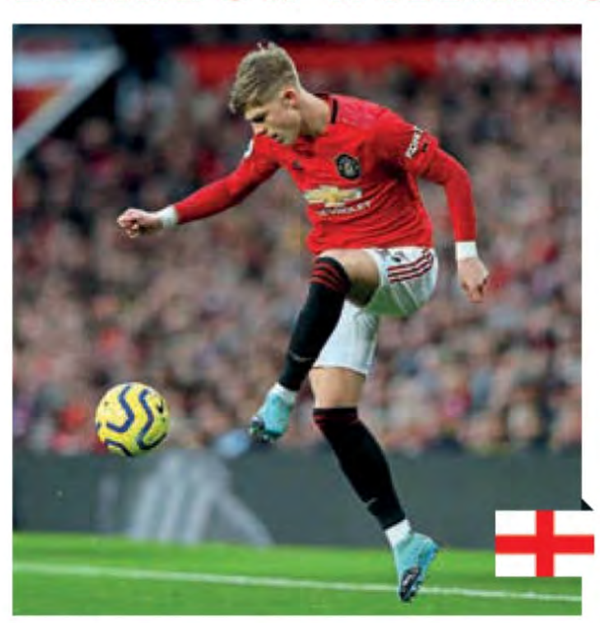


(Liverpool)
Only just turned 19, the right-back is currently understudy to Trent Alexander-Arnold in the Anfield pecking order, but a move into midfield for the England international could allow the highly-rated Welsh youngster more game time as he eyes a spot at Euro 2020 for The Dragons.

ERIC GARCIA

(Manchester City)
City have struggled to replace Vincent Kompany but the Belgian's departure has offered an opportunity to the 19-year-old product of Barcelona's academy. He started against Arsenal in City's first game after lockdown before being stretchered off following a sickening clash with his own goalkeeper.

BRANDON WILLIAMS



(Manchester United)
Not even included on the club's pre-season tour last summer, a suspension for Ashley Young and Luke Shaw's injury problems gave the 19-year-old an early opportunity at left-back and he went on to make 25 first-team appearances in all competitions before lockdown.

JAPHET TANGANGA

(Tottenham Hotspur)
Happy to play anywhere across the back four, he was handed his Premier League debut against champions-elect Liverpool by Jose Mourinho – a man with a reputation for having a distinct lack of trust in youngsters. He could be a key figure in the rebuilding of Spurs' defence.

DEJAN KULUSEVSKI

(Juventus)

The 20-year-old Sweden international is probably the revelation of the 2019-2020 Serie A season. On loan at Parma from Atalanta, such was the quality of his football last autumn in his first full season at the highest level that champions Juventus purchased him during the January transfer window for €35 million.

Juve chose to leave the midfielder at Parma for the rest of this campaign, but next season he is likely to be one of the bright lights in a reshaped side. Atalanta, meanwhile, can congratulate themselves on some tidy business, having picked up Kulusevski from IF Brommapojkarna as a 16-year-old in 2016 for just €100,000.

> "Juventus can see that he is a class player. When he is out there on the pitch he seems to instinctively make the right choice"
>
> **Daniele Adani**

Standing at 6ft 1in, Kulusevski is a quick player with terrific technique, essentially a right-sided attacking midfielder-cum-winger. Asked recently why Juve had opted to spend so much cash on a relatively unproven player, *Sky Italia* pundit and former Inter defender Daniele Adani commented: "It is simple really, Juventus can see that he is a class player. When he is out there on the pitch he seems to instinctively make the right choice."

In what has clearly been a breakthrough season, he also made his international debut in November, coming on as a substitute in Sweden's 3-0 win over the Faroe Islands in qualifying for Euro 2020. Born in Scandinavia to Macedonian parents, Kulusevski made five appearances for Macedonia's Under-17s but has played for Swedish underage teams since 2015.

A perfect example of the Atalanta school of coaching, Kulusevski looks very much the versatile modern player, one who can switch from centre-forward to right wing to central playmaker with disarming facility. A

AURELIEN TCHOUAMENI

(Monaco)

Having impressed at Bordeaux for the past two seasons, the midfielder made an eye-watering €18 million move to Monaco this January but is yet to start for his new side. Next season should see this talented player getting much more game time.

VICTOR MOLLEJO

(Atletico Madrid)

A European Championship winner with Spain's Under-19s last year, the right-winger will return to the Metropolitano Stadium at the end of this season all the better for a spell on loan at Deportivo La Coruna. His pace is sure to cause problems for La Liga defences.

shrewd passer as well as someone who puts himself about during a game, Kulusevski is clearly one of the brightest new faces in Italian football.

Paddy Agnew

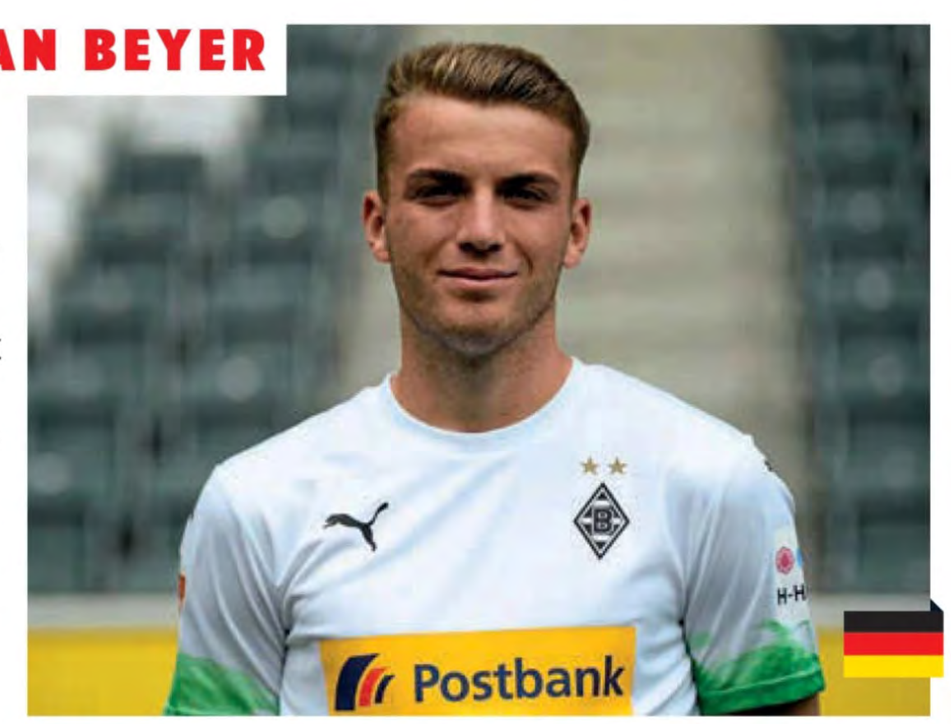
GRADY DIANGANA

(West Ham United)
Slaven Bilic had been aware of the winger during his time in charge at West Ham and had no hesitation in taking him to West Bromwich Albion on loan this season. One of the Championship's danger men before getting injured in January, big things beckon for the England U21 star.

YANGEL HERRERA

(Manchester City)
Exactly where the young Venezuelan will be playing next season is unclear. A regular in the middle of the Granada midfield as they shocked everyone and went top at the start of this campaign, more minutes on a bigger platform lie ahead – whether at City or on another loan spell.

LOUIS JORDAN BEYER



(Borussia Monchengladbach)
Comfortable on the right or in the centre of defence, the 20-year-old has been on loan at second-tier Hamburg since January. Given his many attributes – particularly strength in the tackle and comfort on the ball – he could be a starter for Gladbach next season.

PEDRI

(Barcelona)
Only made his league debut last August, but within a month he had agreed a €5m move to Barcelona. Pepe Mel, his coach at Las Palmas, says of the 17-year-old attacking midfielder: "This boy is a superstar and he is going to be big in European football for the next ten years."

ALEXIS MAC ALLISTER

(Brighton & Hove Albion)
Arriving back in England in January after being on loan at Boca Juniors, the attacking midfielder managed just 13 minutes playing time before the Premier League was suspended. He is now desperate to showcase the talent that has already won him two full caps for Argentina.

Wonderkids making a name for themselves

GIOVANNI REYNA

(Borussia Dortmund)
The ultimate chip off the old block, "Gio" is the son of US soccer legend Claudio Reyna. Only just 17, he already seems to have the world at his feet. Regularly used as an impact substitute in 2019–20, he started the final two games of the season and is every inch a born-to-rule attacking midfielder.

ISAAC LIHADJI

(Marseille)
Said to be "The Next Big Thing" out of Marseille, winger Lihadji fell out with the club at the end of last year when his entourage turned down all of OM's offers of a professional contract. It looks like he's heading to Lille for the 2020–21 campaign, although bigger clubs from abroad had been sniffing around too.

RAYAN CHERKI

(Lyon)
He signed his first pro contract with Lyon in July 2019, but in just over a year Rayan Cherki has become the most talked-about young player in France.

Born the third of five boys in Lyon in August 2003, young Rayan signed for his hometown club at the age of seven and was immediately recognised as one of their brightest young talents. He first made his mark in the prestigious UEFA Youth League for the Under-19s when he notched a goal in a 4-1 victory over Manchester City in September 2018, thereby becoming the youngest player at the time to score in the competition at just 15 years and 33 days old.

Cherki can play out wide or perform

TAKEFUSA KUBO

(Real Madrid)
Kubo immediately went on loan to Mallorca after joining Real last summer, but he'll hope to get his chance at the Santiago Bernabeu next term. A former academy player at Barcelona, the Japanese striker became both the youngest player and goalscorer in J-League history when he was just 15.

ANDER BARRENETXEA

(Real Sociedad)
The first footballer born this century to play in La Liga was only 16 when he made his debut, and afterwards was pictured cycling home in his club tracksuit. The son of a basketball coach, he was part of the Spain U19 squad that won last year's Euros.

in the No.10 role, slotting in behind a main striker and using his fabulous close control, skills and eye for a pass to unlock stubborn defences. With surprising strength for one so young, delightful balance, and two quick and equally strong feet, he also possesses the kind of composure in tight spaces that allows him to maximise his natural talent.

Under Lyon coach Rudi Garcia, Cherki made his first-team debut in Ligue 1 in October last year, coming off the bench against Dijon. He could have become the Champions League's youngest-ever player when he made the Lyon squad for a match against Benfica in November, but failed to make it off the bench that night. He didn't have to wait long to appear in the competition though, replacing Maxwel Cornet in the 74th minute of the match against Zenit later that month.

> With big clubs including Real Madrid already sniffing around, Rayan Cherki's future looks very bright indeed

After making his first full start in a League Cup match against Toulouse in December, Cherki got his first senior goal in a 7-0 Coupe de France victory over Bourg-en-Bresse this January, making him the youngest senior scorer in Lyon's history.

With experts already getting excited about Cherki's precocious talent, the youngster then announced his arrival on the French scene in a cup match against Nantes, scoring twice and notching two assists in a 4-3 victory. With big clubs including Real Madrid already sniffing around, Rayan Cherki's future looks very bright indeed.

Howard Johnson

TANGUY KOUASSI

(Bayern Munich)
Only turned 18 in June, but having made his breakthrough with PSG this season he's now chosen to join German champions Bayern Munich next term, to the disappointment of coach Thomas Tuchel: "It is not a secret that I like him a lot. He had a big future in this club. I can't understand it."

PABLO MORENO

(Manchester City)
Another young star on the move, Moreno will join Manchester City this summer, having already moved from Barcelona to Juventus two years ago. Yet to make his senior debut, the highly promising 18-year-old is likely to join Girona on loan next season.

BORJA SAINZ

(Alaves)
Sainz made his debut at Mendizorroza in the winter and immediately looked different to the rest, a wide attacker with a neat touch and an enjoyable directness. Alaves intend to hand him more opportunities to play next season.

Wonderkids making a name for themselves

YOUSSOUFA MOUKOKO

(Borussia Dortmund)
Dortmund's fledgling goal machine, still only 15, is so talented that the German football authorities recently ripped up the rulebook to accommodate him. It used to be the case that a player had to be at least 17 to compete professionally in the Bundesliga. But in March, after Dortmund requested a rethink, the DFL agreed to reduce their minimum age requirement, now allowing 16-year-olds to have a piece of the action.

Good news indeed for the teenage striker. In just a few months' time – on November 20 to be exact – he will be

FLORIAN WIRTZ

(Bayer Leverkusen)
Barely 17, the BayArena midfield whizz kid has been a revelation these past few weeks, effortlessly settling into the first-team rhythm. And with his first league goal, in a 4-2 home loss to Bayern Munich in June, he became the youngest scorer in Bundesliga history.

ADIL AOUCHICHE

(Paris Saint-Germain)
The star of France's 2019 Under-17 Euros campaign scored an amazing nine goals in five games from midfield, which made people sit up and take notice of the PSG academy graduate. Looks set to shine for Saint-Etienne next season after reportedly deciding to leave the Parc des Princes.

eligible to line up with the seniors and the smart money says he will not have to wait long for his chance at the top level. There have already been rumours that a number of Premier League outfits would like to bring him in on a temporary basis, though Dortmund youth supremo Lars Ricken has described such talk as not a "sensible move for German football.

"We at Dortmund give valuable playing time to young players," said Ricken in an interview with the Munich-based website *Sport1*. "All the money in the world wouldn't compensate."

> This season he has not paused for breath on the marksmanship front, netting 34 goals in 20 appearances for the Dortmund Under-19s. He absolutely is the real deal

Moukoko, who was born in Cameroon and later spent some of his formative years in the northern German port of Hamburg, is precocity personified. At the age of just 12 he was shining for Dortmund's Under-17s and over the past three years has racked up an incredible 130 goals for various Black and Yellow junior XIs. This season he has not paused for breath on the marksmanship front, netting 34 goals in 20 appearances for the Dortmund Under-19s. He absolutely is the real deal. On the first weekend of this season he notched a double hat-trick in a 9-2 hammering of Wuppertaler SV and in September he became the youngest goalscorer in the history of the UEFA Youth League. He has been training with the Dortmund first team for the last six months.

Nick Bidwell

YANN GBOHO

(Rennes)
Born in the Ivory Coast to a pro footballer, Gboho was chased by a number of French clubs before opting to join Rennes, where his uncle played from 2013 to 2016. The versatile France youth international can play anywhere across the front line.

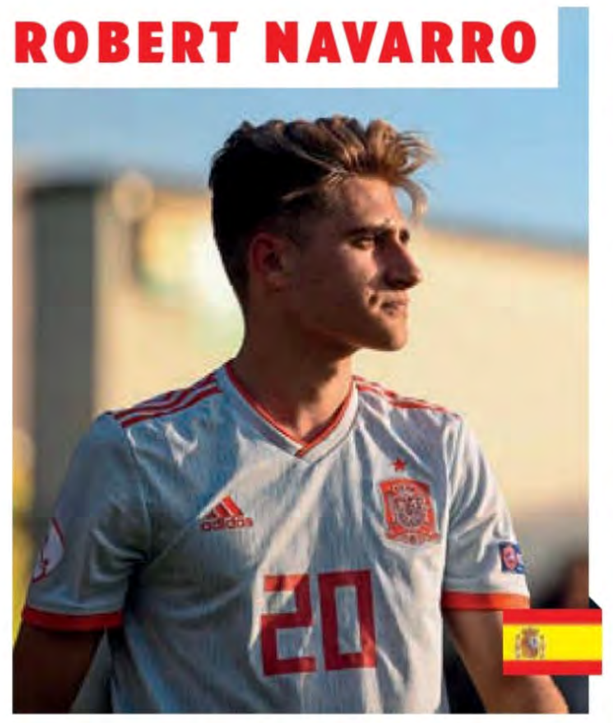
FABIO SILVA

(Porto)
Far too many Portuguese front-line wannabes crash and burn after being hailed as the "next Cristiano Ronaldo". Silva, however, may just be the one to live up to the hype. A prolific goalscorer at youth level for the Dragons, he makes the art of finishing appear impressively easy.

LEE KANG-IN

(Valencia)
The South Korean won a TV talent show aged six and joined Valencia's academy at ten. Although he is an extremely talented creative attacker and the club's great hope, there is a sense that he sometimes overplays. Still only 19, he is expected to press on next season.

ROBERT NAVARRO



(Real Sociedad)
Attacking midfielder once of Barcelona, Navarro was Monaco's youngest-ever first-team player at 16 years and eight months, but failed to progress in France. After joining Sociedad for €6m last year he is expected to shine in Spain next season.

RONALDO CAMARA

(Benfica)
Spent three years in Sporting's academy before joining Lisbon rivals Benfica in 2015. Although he has yet to break into the first team, the 17-year-old central midfielder has already proved his maturity by playing two years above his age group in the national youth set-up when just 15.

Making strides at Europe's biggest clubs

BRAHIM DIAZ

(Real Madrid)
A daring, determined, creative attacker who left Manchester City because he wasn't getting chances, he hasn't really had them yet at Real Madrid, either. But in those rare moments when he has had opportunities, there have been flashes of a bright future.

MASON GREENWOOD

(Manchester United)
Introduced from the bench more times than any other player in the Premier League before the lockdown, the 18-year-old's five goals also made him this term's top-scoring teen. Creating an attack with him alongside Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial, supported by Paul Pogba and Bruno Fernandes, is a nice problem for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to have.

ALESSANDRO BASTONI

(Internazionale)
Another talent off the Atalanta production line, he played his way into Antonio Conte's Inter side during the coach's first season with the club. Strong in the air and with an educated left foot, he is widely seen as one of the most promising Italian defenders of his generation.

MARCO ASENSIO

(Real Madrid)
Not so young any more, he already has a full trophy cabinet, but it still feels like Asensio's career hasn't really yet started because of injury. After a 13-month absence from La Liga it had been forgotten just how good he is, but he reminded everybody by scoring with his first touch against Valencia.

RIQUI PUIG

(Barcelona)
An all-round midfielder and the outstanding player in the Barcelona B side who Quique Setien immediately threw into the first team... and then immediately took out again. Coaching staff want him to offer more continuity, not chase the perfect play every time, but his is a rare talent.

ANSU FATI

(Barcelona)
A kid who excited everyone like no player had for a very long time, Ansu Fati mania was breaking out last year. Despite being just 17, he was handed a

MANOLO PORTANOVA

(Juventus)
A regular in the Juventus U23 team this season, the 20-year-old has already played for the senior team, making his debut in Juve's 2-0 loss to Sampdoria in May last year. A player for the future, he may well be loaned out by the champions for 2020-21.

LEON DAJAKU

(Bayern Munich)
It speaks volumes that the young German-Kosovan right-winger or false nine has been training of late with the Bayern pros, having made his first team debut before Christmas. Earlier this season he scored from the half-way line in a reserve-team fixture.

debut for Spain's Under-21 side – as much to ensure that he didn't sign up for some other country first – and was even on the verge of a full call-up.

"It's not normal," said his then club coach, Ernesto Valverde, and he was right, it wasn't. It all felt a bit much. And when, inevitably, things slowed, when Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Antoine Griezmann were naturally played ahead of him, and his opportunities were reduced, there was an equally inevitable sense of disappointment. Maybe he had been built up too fast – but then, if the situation was not normal, nor was he. What he had done was extraordinary: the hype justified, even if it was not helpful.

> Everything he did was outstanding: the speed, the agility, the touch, the decision making. A performance so good it was almost absurd

Born in Guinea-Bissau, Fati came to Spain aged six and first lived in the town of Marinaleda – a self-declared communist utopia where his dad had sought help and work. The family then settled in Herrera, near Seville. He joined Sevilla's youth system and then moved to Barcelona.

At 16 years and 298 days he became the second-youngest player ever to appear for Barca's first team. The following week he became the youngest to score for the club, heading home just six minutes after coming on against Osasuna. And the very next game he scored again, 111 seconds into his home debut at Camp Nou.

It was more than that, too. He provided an assist minutes later and everything he did was outstanding: the speed, the agility, the touch, the decision making. A performance so good it was almost absurd. And all that from a kid that wasn't even 17 yet. It was, one paper declared, "a recital to stir the soul". The excitement was off the scale, the club scrambling to get him signed on a bigger contract as the spotlight shone bright and sirens called.

All that has calmed now, normality resumed, but Fati has already been identified as the man – the kid – to lead Barca into the post-Messi era, a time that terrifies everyone a little less since the teenager appeared.

Sid Lowe

Remember the names

HANNES WOLF

(RB Leipzig)
There will be few players in the Bundesliga keener to make an impact next term than the dynamic 21-year-old Austrian midfielder. This season, his first in Leipzig following a €12 million switch from Red Bull sister franchise Salzburg, he has been bashed by fate at every turn: breaking his ankle while playing for Austria at the 2019 European Under-21 Championship, crucially missing pre-season at his new club, sidelined for four-and-a-half months in total, and then struggling for match practice on recovering.

Clearly frustrated, he let it be known he was thinking about moving on, but RBL coach Julian Nagelsmann told him not to be so silly, advising him to put his head down and work through his difficulties on the training ground. "We can't sell or loan out every player who feels dissatisfied because he is not playing enough," Nagelsmann explained to *Kicker* magazine. "It never helps in life to run away in tough times."

A magnificent talent, full of creativity, enterprise and dribbling ability, industrious and tenacious in the pressing phase, and a decent finisher

Patience will have to be the name of the game for Wolf, who was quite the head-turner during his five years on Salzburg's books, notably catching the eye with his excellent work in the club's conquest of the UEFA Youth League title in 2017 and the first team's impressive march to the semi-finals of the Europa League in 2018.

Born and raised in Austria's second city Graz, Wolf is a magnificent talent, full of creativity, enterprise and dribbling ability, industrious and tenacious in the pressing phase, and a decent finisher. He is versatile too, equally comfortable in attacking midfield, on the wing or as a mobile striker. His one big flaw is that he can be a little too hectic on the ball, and he must also cut out the "fancy-Dan" activities, annoying

NATHANAEL MBUKU

(Reims)
The tricky winger is very highly rated at Reims, and with a contract that runs until 2023 already in his pocket it will be a huge surprise if he doesn't quickly add to his tally of 11 Ligue 1 appearances. Mbuku has a big role to play in the future of Reims, who have just achieved their best season for over 40 years.

MALICK THIAW

(Schalke)
The 19-year-old German-born son of a Senegalese father and Finnish mother arguably has all the necessary attributes of an outstanding centre-back: height, aerial power, an eye for imminent danger, speed off the mark and muscular mass. Liverpool are thought to be closely monitoring him.

RBL early this year with a social-media video in which he glorified his celebrity lifestyle.

Nick Bidwell

FABRICE HARTMANN

(RB Leipzig)
Many Leipzig insiders consider the teenager, who is a versatile and goal-hungry forward, to be the jewel in the crown of the club's youth system. He is currently on the rehabilitation treadmill after damaging cruciate ligaments this spring but hopes to be back before the end of the year.

MOHAMED SIMAKAN

(Strasbourg)
He may have started his career at Marseille, but Simakan has established his reputation as a rugged, no-nonsense defender at Strasbourg. With Italian giants Milan supposedly interested in him, 2020-21 could be a big campaign for the 6ft 2ins Frenchman of Guinean descent.

NICOLO ARMINI

(Lazio)
Brought into the first-team squad for this summer's post-COVID restart, the 19-year-old had already made his debut in both Serie A and the Europa League. Handled by top agent Mino Raiola and captain of Lazio's senior youth side, he looks like a player with a bright future.

LEANDRO BARREIRO

(Mainz)
The Luxembourg international has only started a dozen or so games in the German top flight this season but undoubtedly looks the part. The 20-year-old defensive midfielder rarely makes mistakes thanks to his superior awareness, intelligence and collective instincts.

ALESSANDRO PLIZZARI

(Milan)
Two summers ago when it seemed that Gianluigi Donnarumma was about to leave Milan, some observers suggested that the then fourth-choice keeper Plizzari would be a worthy successor. Capped at every age group from U15 to U21 level for Italy, he seems destined for a spot in the Serie A sunshine.

Remember the names

GAETANO CASTROVILLI

(Fiorentina)
In his first season in Serie A, Castrovilli established himself as a pillar of Fiorentina's midfield and deservedly earned his first international cap, playing the closing minutes of Italy's Euro qualifier in Bosnia and Herzegovina last November.

RYAN GRAVENBERCH

(Ajax)
There's always a new consignment of talent waiting to be unloaded at Ajax and the 18-year-old box-to-box midfielder has to be the pick of the next generation, having scored twice in nine Eredivisie games last term. He has replaced Frenkie De Jong as the Dutch giants' midfield maestro.

JORIS CHOTARD

(Montpellier)
Born in Orange in the south east of France, the midfielder enjoyed an impressive breakthrough season in 2019-20, making over 20 appearances in Ligue 1 and earning rich praise for the maturity of his performances.

His first-team debut came in the opening game of the season, a 1-0 defeat against Rennes, before he'd signed his first professional contract. He duly put pen to paper in September on the day of his 18th birthday and set about becoming a firm fan favourite. Former Montpellier player Geoffrey Dernis was quick to praise the player's qualities, saying: "It's rare to be that calm and mature at such a young age. Chotard's got pretty much everything already. He doesn't waste the ball and his technical ability is way above average."

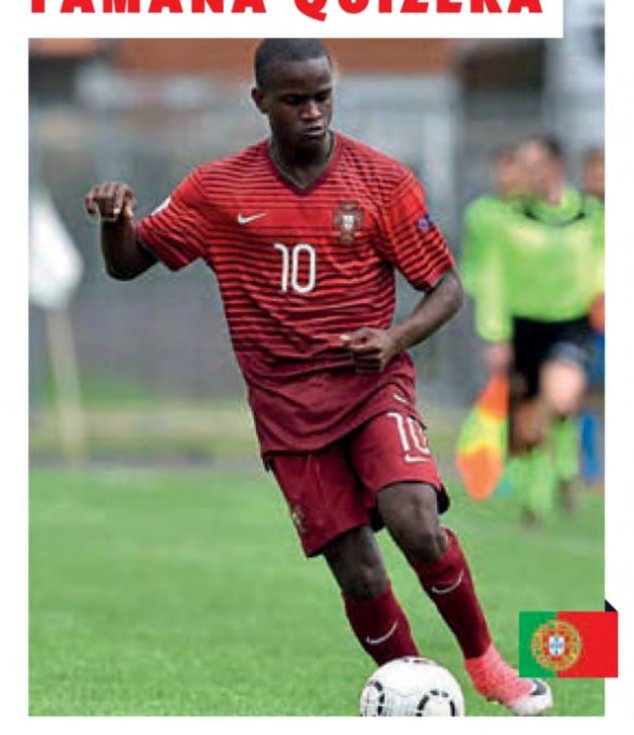
> "Chotard's got pretty much everything already. He doesn't waste the ball and his technical ability is way above average"
>
> Geoffrey Dernis

He might have grown up a Marseille fan, but it was Montpellier who first noticed the talents of the youngster when he was playing for US Le Pontet in the suburbs of Avignon back in 2016. "I knew he was talented," says his coach at the time, Kevin Corbiere. "He could consistently hit the bar from 30 or 40 metres out in training drills. And he always had a great attitude."

Certainly Chotard's rapid rise doesn't appear to have gone to his head and he admits: "Just because everything's going well right now doesn't mean that will always be the case. I have to keep working and stay focused, because things can go down just as quickly as they've come up."

Chotard has already made his mark at international level with both the French Under-18 and Under-19 sides. The respected CIES Football Observatory in Switzerland, meanwhile, has placed him in their list of the 50 most valuable footballers born after the year 2000. With offers supposedly already on the table from bigger clubs both in France and abroad, Chotard has

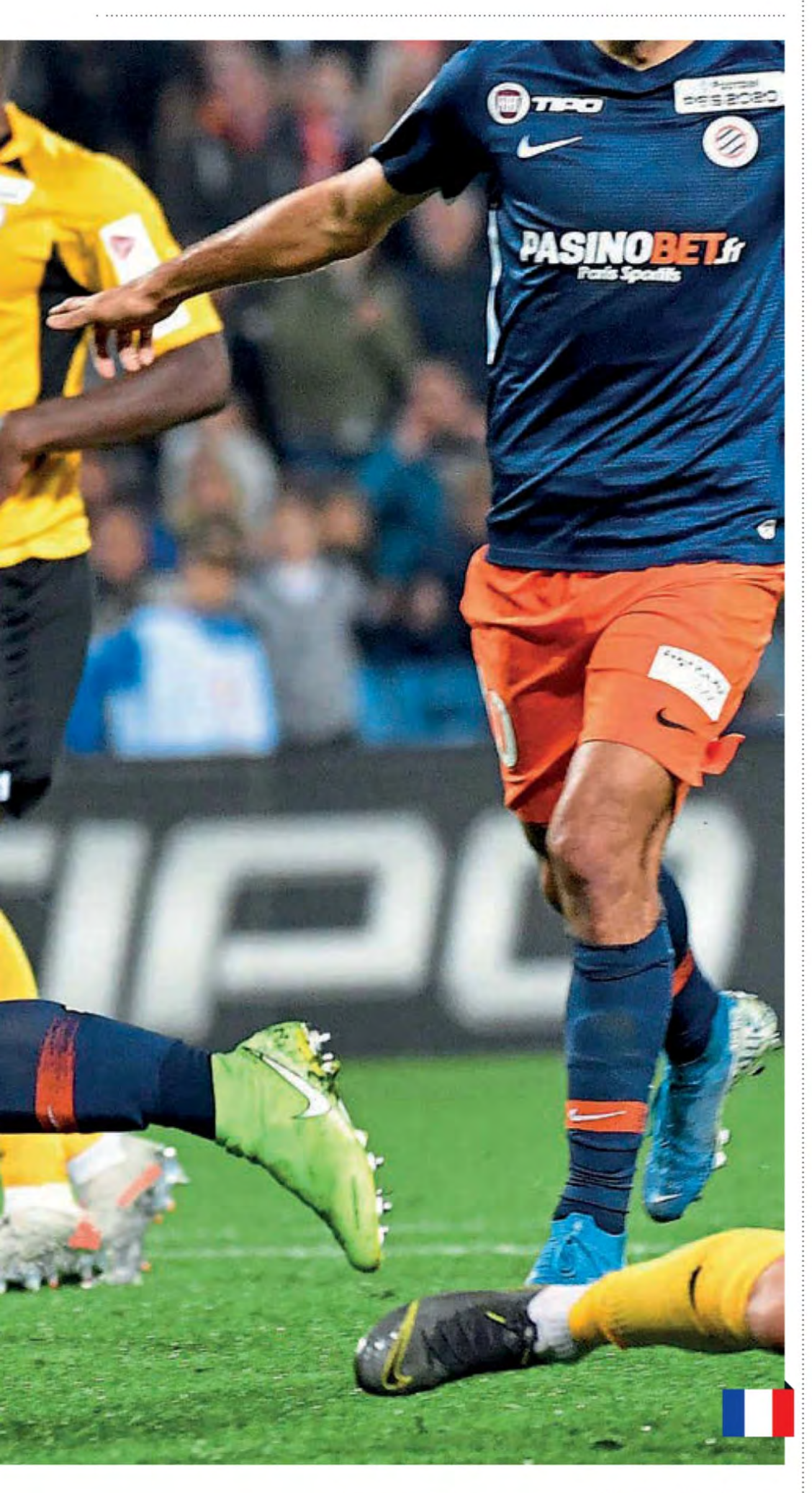
FAMANA QUIZERA



(Borussia Monchengladbach)
Gladbach prised the thoroughbred attacking midfielder away from Benfica's junior ranks a couple of years ago. The Portugal youth international has impressed with his link-up play and penetrative impulses and is tipped to be the next big thing at Borussia Park.

LUCIEN AGOUME

(Internazionale)
After captaining France at last year's Under-17 World Cup, Inter paid Sochaux €4.5million for the exciting talent last July. Able to play anywhere in midfield, from defensive duties to attacking pivot, Agoume is now ready to make his mark in Serie A.



been quick to reassure Montpellier's fans that he's going nowhere, insisting that he will definitely be at the club for their next campaign.

Howard Johnson

WESLEY FOFANA

(Saint-Etienne)
Having formed a sound defensive partnership with William Saliba, it will be interesting to see how Fofana fares without his Arsenal-bound team-mate. His performances so far suggest that he has what it takes to step up to the plate and lead the Saints' defence.

ALESSIO RICCARDI

(Roma)
"Discovered" by Roma legend Bruno Conti ten years ago, Riccardi made his debut in last season's Coppa Italia. His only Serie A involvement pre-lockdown was to watch October's clash with Milan from the bench, but the Italy U17 star may finally get his chance to step from the *Primavera* in 2020-21.

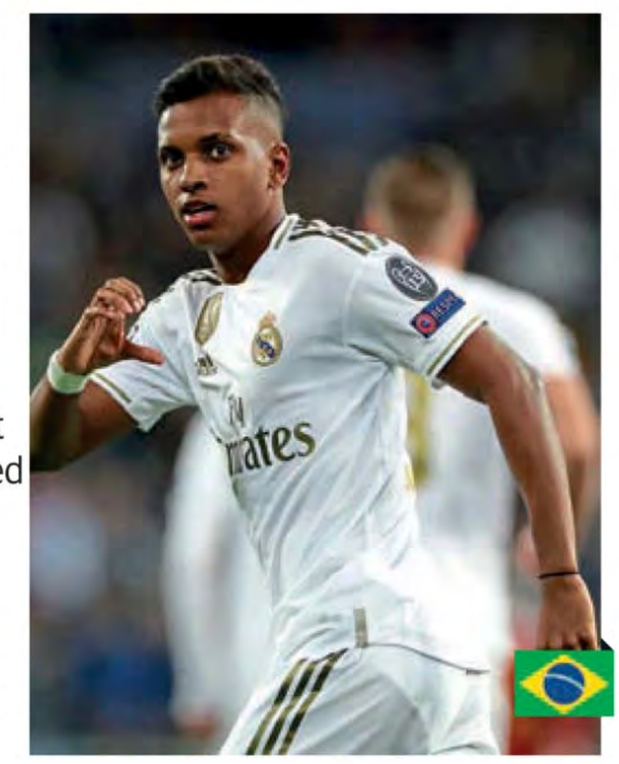
MAXENCE CAQUERET

(Lyon)
Caqueret has represented France at all levels from Under-16 to Under-19 and made seven composed and assured appearances for Lyon in 2019-20. Next term could be his breakthrough season, especially with Lyon seemingly missing out on European football in the wake of the shortened 2019-20 campaign.

The continent's best young talents

RODRYGO

(Real Madrid)
The €45m signing was the first kid born this century to score in the Champions League, where he has four goals in four games after a hat-trick against Galatasaray. Agile, skilled and cool, he scored within a minute of his debut, and his instant success could well be just the first chapter in a glittering career.



JOAO PEDRO

(Watford)
A £3.6m signing from Fluminense back in October, Watford manager Nigel Pearson has been keen to keep expectations for the 18-year-old striker in check. But even he has had to admit: "My attitude to young players is that if they're good enough, I don't care how young they are really."

MATIAS PALACIOS

(San Lorenzo)
Now 18, the midfielder became his club's youngest-ever debutant in 2018. Real Madrid were rumoured to have offered €12.5m for his services after he fired Argentina U17s to the South American Championship and then starred at the U17 World Cup.

DARIO SARMIENTO

(Estudiantes)
Playing for his club's Under-20 side at 14 and in the first team at 16, the attacking midfielder's dribbling skills out on the left flank at just 17 have already seen him compared to Lionel Messi. Likely to make his first senior start when the Argentine league resumes.

GABRIEL VERON

(Palmeiras)
The Golden Ball winner as Brazil won the Under-17 World Cup in 2019, scoring three goals and assisting two. Reports were circulating in May of the winger, who turns 18 in September, moving to Europe this summer and then being loaned back to Palmeiras until next year.

TALLES MAGNO

(Vasco da Gama)
Another star of Brazil's U17s, the teen has a €50m release clause at Vasco, where he has played 22 games so far and scored two goals. The centre-forward, who can also play out wide, could be set for many more unless a big European side comes calling.

MORATO

(Benfica)
According to the Brazilian centre-back's passport, he was born just 18 years ago. Facially and physically, though, he looks anything but a boy, giving off the vibes of a battle-hardened pro. Should Benfica opt to sell much-coveted stopper Ruben Dias, Morato could well fill the void.

EDER MILITAO

(Real Madrid)
"I watched him on TV and thought 'he's not all that', but then I went up against him and he left me trailing – and I'm quick," one opponent says. If all goes well, the Brazilian will be a fixture in Madrid's defence for many years as Sergio Ramos nears the end of his career.

GABRIEL MARTINELLI

(Arsenal)

A £6m signing from Brazilian minnows Ituano last summer, few expected to see much of the former futsal player this season. But despite an array of attacking talent at their disposal, Arsenal are already reaping the benefits of having on board a teenager who scored under three different managers in his first six months at the club.

After finding the net twice against Nottingham Forest in the League Cup on his debut, it wasn't until Freddie Ljungberg stepped in to replace Unai Emery as interim boss that he started his first Premier League game. He was on the scoresheet again, this time against West Ham United, and when Mikel Arteta took over permanently in December, the youngster was on target once more in a 1-1 draw with Sheffield United.

With Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Alexandre Lacazette both the subject of much transfer speculation, the Gunners can be confident they have someone to step up should either move away from North London this summer.

Described as "world class" by goalkeeper and team-mate Bernd Leno, the winger had trials with Manchester United and Barcelona before moving to The Emirates, where his progress has taken even Arteta by surprise.

> "The way he competes, how brave he is with every decision he makes on the field, is very unusual for an 18-year-old"
>
> **Mikel Arteta**

"I heard a lot of things about Gabby before I joined, and the moment I saw him training it confirmed all the things I was told," says the Gunners boss. "When you see him in big games, how he goes about everything, it's surprising. The way he competes, how brave he is with every decision he makes on the field, is very unusual for an 18-year-old."

And Arteta isn't the only one to have been impressed. Capped by Brazil at Under-23 level, Martinelli was called up to the senior squad last year, although he has yet to win his first cap. However, being of Italian descent through his father, an alternative invitation from the *Azzurri* would not be out of keeping with his extraordinary progress so far.

Nich Hills

SANDRO TONALI

(Brescia)

For much of the last year, football writers have been suggesting that Brescia's 20-year-old central midfielder is one of the hottest young talents in the Italian game. So much so that he has been widely dubbed "the new Pirlo".

An epithet like that would weigh heavily on any young player. So, imagine Tonali's surprise when he saw a comment from the 2006 World Cup winner himself on Instagram. "Tonali? He is a much more complete player than me", said Pirlo in response to yet another question about his supposed heir.

In a recent interview with *La Gazzetta dello Sport's Sportweek*, Tonali confessed his surprise at that comment, modestly adding that Pirlo was "exaggerating". Nevertheless, the youngster will be one of the hottest items on the Italian transfer market this summer.

Brescia owner Massimo Cellino has confirmed that big-name clubs have already enquired about his player. No names mentioned, but media speculation – and financial logic – points to Juventus and Internazionale.

> "Tonali? He is a much more complete player than me"
>
> **Andrea Pirlo**

A physically imposing player who combines work rate with quality technique, Tonali has terrific vision, is adept with either foot, can play the short or long game, and occasionally gets up to score goals. A ball winner and battler as well as someone who can hit a telling pass, he himself admits that the player he most admired growing up wasn't Pirlo but his more combative team-mate Gennaro Gattuso, the current Napoli coach.

A key figure in the Brescia side that won promotion to Serie A under coach Eugenio Corini last summer, Tonali already has three Italy caps. Along with players such as Inter's Nicolo Barella and Nicolo Zaniolo of Roma, he will be the face of the new Italy at next summer's rescheduled European Championship finals.

Paddy Agnew

SAMU CHUKWUEZE

(Villarreal)
It's hard not to get excited about the 21-year-old forward. Quick and skilful through the middle or out wide, there is a sense that he may already be looking beyond Villarreal, with the biggest teams in the Premier League paying close attention.

PIETRO PELLEGRI

(Monaco)
The 6ft 2ins Italian started his career with Genoa, but joined Monaco for a reported €25m aged just 16 in 2018. He's hardly played since due to a series of troublesome injuries, so he needs a big season in 2020-21 to deliver on his potential going forward.

ZAYDOU YOUSSOUF

(Saint-Etienne)
Youssouf joined Saint-Etienne from Bordeaux in 2019 and quickly impressed at Stade Geoffroy-Guichard with some energetic performances in the middle of the park. Although he suffered a troublesome knee injury, Ligue 1's early finish should allow him to fully recover.

CHRISTOPH BAUMGARTNER

(Hoffenheim)
Since the turn of the year the Austria Under-21 playmaker has been the recipient of much praise for his ability to find space between the lines, his brilliance as a dribbler and a goalscoring flair. While he prefers the No.10 role, he can operate anywhere in the attacking third.

BARTLOMIEJ DRAGOWSKI

(Fiorentina)
The young goalkeeper was only 18 years old when he made his Europa League debut for Jagiellonia Bialystok in 2015, and joined Fiorentina a year later. His breakthrough came on loan at Empoli where he made 14 appearances in the second half of last season, but now that he's back in Florence he's first choice and one to watch.

FERRAN TORRES

(Valencia)
European champion at U17 and U19 level with Spain, scoring twice in the final against France in the latter, Ferran is perhaps the outstanding player of this generation. A winger with skill, finishing ability and incredible technique, he is yet to renew with Valencia – no wonder they're worried.

ISMAEL BENNACER

(Milan)
After just half a season with Milan, the talented and creative Algerian seems destined to be a key figure in the club's rebuilding plans. A key component in his country's Africa Cup of Nations win in Egypt in 2019, he was adjudged to be the Player Of The Tournament.

ALEXANDER ISAK

(Real Sociedad)
Tall, slim striker who scored against Real Madrid at the Bernabeu and looked so natural standing there in that arena, unfazed by it all, announcing his arrival. Strong and technical, Dortmund may yet regret letting him go.

MARTIN ODEGAARD

(Real Madrid)

The Norwegian joined Real Madrid at 16 to great fanfare and could now be set to re-join them at 21.

In two-and-a-half seasons with Madrid's B team in the Spanish third tier he rarely stood out as much as expectation demanded, so when he headed to the Netherlands on loan some suggested that his signing had been proven a failure. All that noise for nothing, all that hype and hope for no return.

During two seasons in the Eredivisie, first with Heerenveen and then with Vitesse, he was largely forgotten in Spain and many felt that he was never likely to make much of an impact at the highest level.

But that overlooked the fact that he was still very young, seeking continuity and confidence. And, escaping the attention and developing alone, a player was emerging, that early talent realised. It also failed to appreciate the intelligence with which he, and his family, have managed his career.

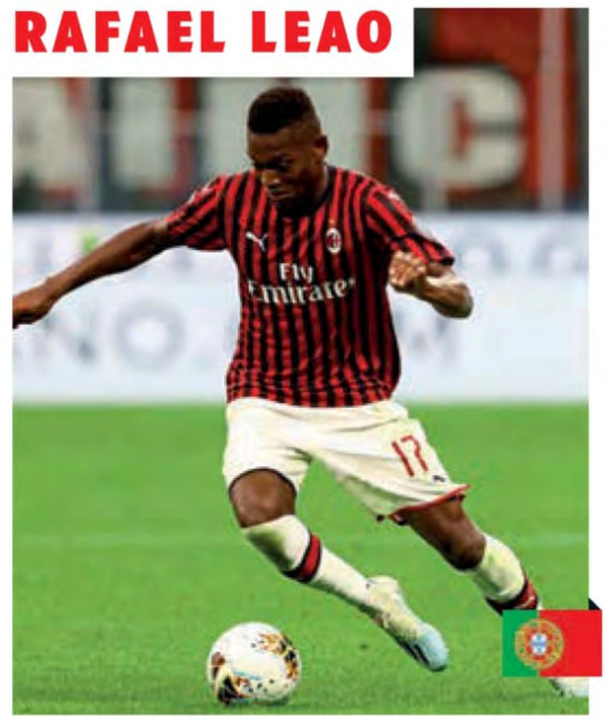
This season, there can be no such doubts. On loan at Real Sociedad, he has been superb. A player of vision, energy and a wonderful touch, who can play off the front or anywhere in midfield, capable of providing almost impossible assists, it is no exaggeration to suggest he might have been the very best player in La Liga this season.

He has been the creative fulcrum of a side pushing for a Champions League place and which reached the Copa del Rey Final. There has been quality, and maturity too, a sense of responsibility and leadership striking in a player still so young.

Originally, his loan deal was for two years but Madrid can re-call him early, and they would like to. He, on the other hand, may want to continue to develop and get opportunities, which

> A player of vision, energy and a wonderful touch…it is no exaggeration to suggest he might have been the very best player in La Liga this season

RAFAEL LEAO



(Milan)

In his first season with Milan, Portugal U21 international Leao did enough to establish himself as a player for the future, with more starts than any other forward at the club. Big, fast and able to play either in central attack or on the wing, he looks useful.

NOAH KATTERBACH

(Cologne)

Highly talented left-back who has spent 12 of his 19 years with Cologne, and made his debut in October after the club's return to the Bundesliga. One of the most exciting prospects in German football, he was voted the best Under-17 player in the country in 2018.

he knows is guaranteed at Real Sociedad. If he is to return to Madrid, it will be to play. And right now, he plays better than anyone.

Sid Lowe

DIEGO LAINEZ

(Real Betis)
The tiny Mexican kid, who was laughed at by the USA's players for being so small, joined Betis after winning the Golden Ball at the Toulon Tournament in 2018. Although it hasn't really worked in Spain so far, Lainez has only just turned 20 so time and opportunities await.

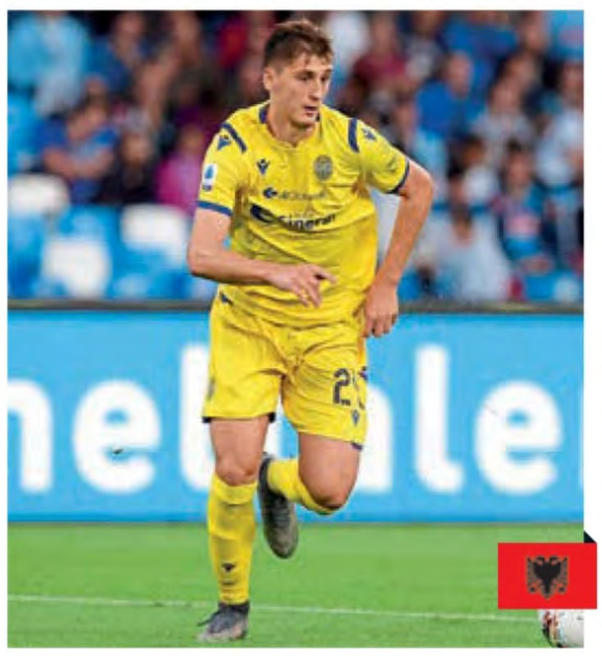
PHIL FODEN

(Manchester City)
The 20-year-old that Pep Guardiola says is "the most talented player I have ever seen in my career as a manager" has already played in three Premier League campaigns. However, next season's will be his most important: if he can successfully replace the departing David Silva, a first England call-up will surely follow.

MOHAMMED SALISU

(Valladolid)
Tall, athletic, and attracting attention, the centre-back has a contract at Valladolid until 2022 but few expect him to stay that long. A €12million buyout clause is no deterrent for a player that the sporting director says has "tremendous potential".

MARASH KUMBULLA



(Hellas Verona)
Born in Italy to Albanian parents, the defender is a product of the Verona youth team. Big and powerful at 6ft 2ins, his impressive debut season in Serie A has attracted the attention of the big boys – Inter, Juventus and Lazio. He has opted to play for Albania, making his debut in October.

JOSH SARGENT

(Werder Bremen)
Now in his second season in Germany, the flame-haired forward is yet to carve out a permanent niche for himself. But the 20-year-old USA international is very much a work in progress and has a great deal going for him, not least his competitive spirit and instincts in the box.

The next generation of clinical goalscorers

JOSH MAJA

(Bordeaux)
The former Sunderland striker and Nigeria international made a great start in France after joining Bordeaux in January last year, before falling out of favour in the second half of last season. However, a proven top-flight goalscorer will surely always be in demand.

SEBASTIANO ESPOSITO

(Internazionale)
The striker has only just turned 18, but after impressing at a pre-season training camp last summer he has already played Champions League football and scored in Serie A. Physically imposing and composed, he looks a real star in the making and could figure in Antonio Conte's plans for 2020-21.

JOSHUA ZIRKZEE

(Bayern Munich)
A teenager scoring with their first touch within seconds of coming on will always turn heads; doing it again three days later is evidence of a rare talent. That is how Zirkzee announced himself on the European stage for Bayern in December – sealing late wins against Freiburg and Wolfsburg – and the early signs are that the Dutchman belongs at the highest level.

By the end of last season he had outgrown youth football, scoring 12 goals in 14 matches in the Under-19s Bundesliga, and adding another four in the UEFA Youth League.

A born finisher with a glacial mindset, the 6ft 4ins forward is blessed with considerable pace and impressive technique, and at 19 still has room to grow, both physically and technically.

While Robert Lewandowski shows no signs of slowing down after his highest-scoring Bundesliga season ever, Bayern have in Zirkzee a player with the potential to fill the prolific Pole's boots. His third goal for the club came while Lewandowski was recovering from a knee injury, and he added his fourth when the Pole was suspended, proving that he is already more than capable of leading the line.

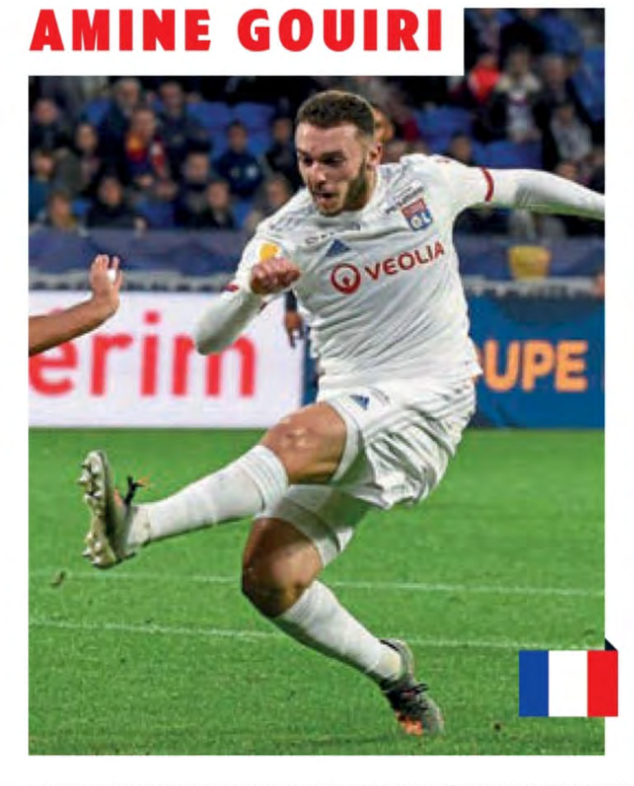
Indeed, Zirkzee is committed to claiming the No.9 shirt for himself one day, telling Dutch publication *Voetbal International*: "I want to become the No.1 striker at Bayern – that's always been my objective." But he also understands that he has a great opportunity to learn from a legend, admitting: "His timing, how he shields the ball, his sprints towards goal – I'm taking in everything Lewandowski does."

> "His timing, how he shields the ball - I'm taking in everything Lewandowski does"
> **Joshua Zirkzee**

Although he is still waiting to break into the Netherlands Under-21 side, Zirkzee could be one of many youngsters to benefit from the postponement of Euro 2020, with the chance to make a serious impact next summer instead. If he continues the progress he has made so far it will be hard for the country's senior coach, Ronald Koeman, to ignore him for much longer.

The ex-Feyenoord apprentice could

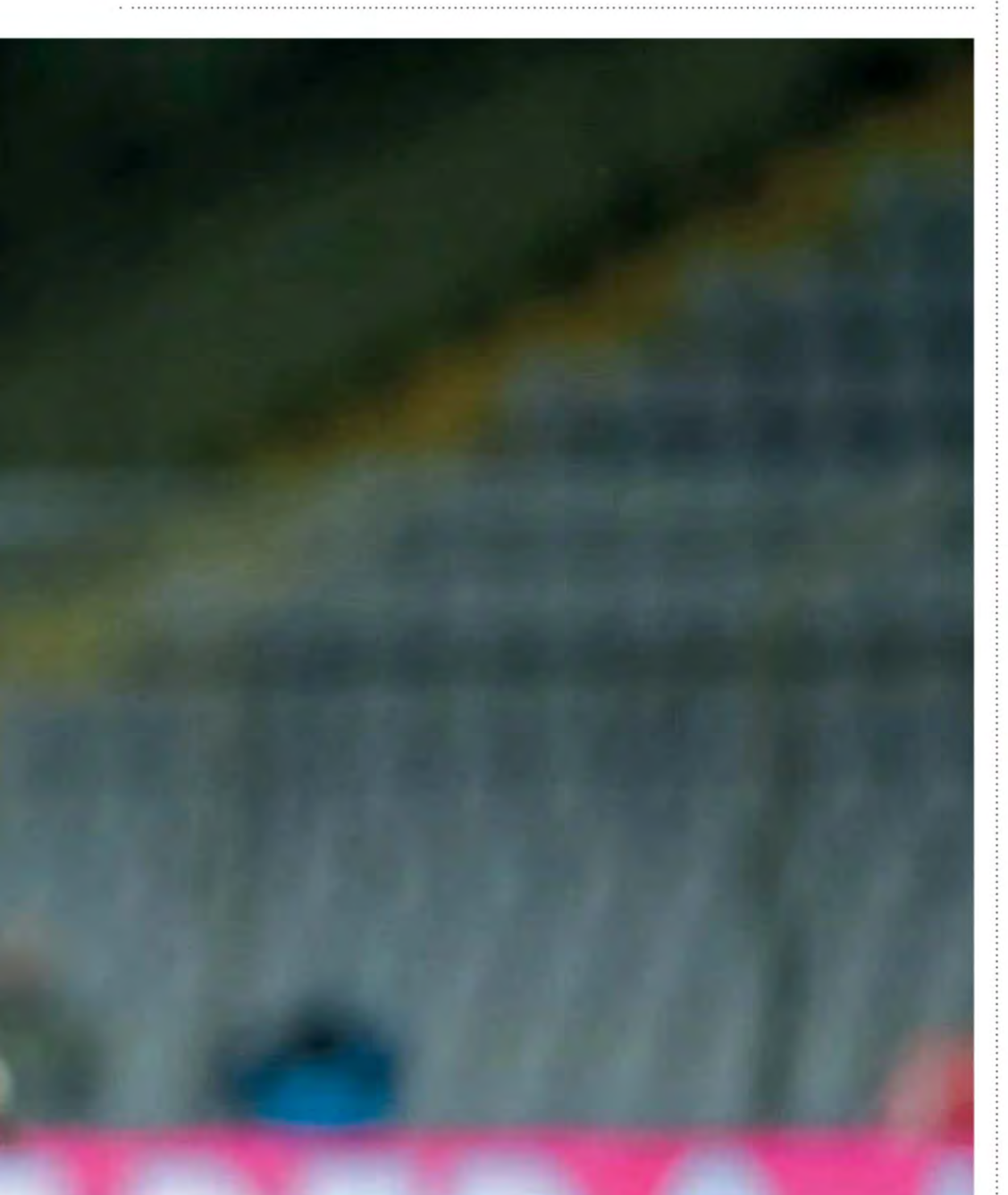
AMINE GOUIRI



(Lyon)
A permanent fixture in the French youth structures since 2016, the striker of Algerian descent scored eight goals in 12 matches for Lyon's reserves last season, and will now be looking to establish himself in the Lyon first team after making one Ligue 1 appearance in 2019-20.

AHMED KUTUCU

(Schalke)
After racking up plenty of goals in youth football, Kutucu may well be the answer to Schalke's marked lack of punch up front. Fans of the Gelsenkirchen outfit certainly hope so, as the 20-year-old local lad is already highly popular on the terraces.



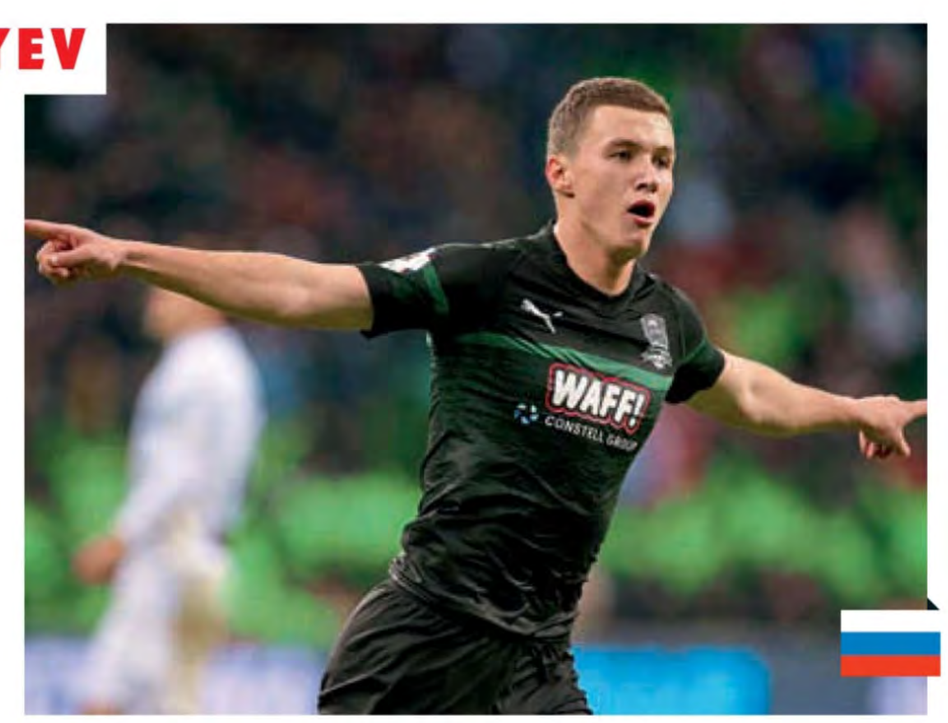
not have wished for a better start to life in the Bundesliga, but how his career continues in 2021 could be even more exciting.

Nick Bidwell

KARIM ADEYEMI

(Red Bull Salzburg)
Only 18, the future is ostensibly mapped out for the Munich-born goalgetter of Nigerian heritage: a breakout season with Salzburg next term, followed by a penthouse move, with the likes of Barcelona, Dortmund and Liverpool among his many suitors.

IVAN IGNATYEV



(Rubin Kazan)
Despite hailing from Siberia, the land of the big chill, the Russia Under-21 star has way too much ability to end up in the deep freeze. That said, the boy wonder still needs time to fully integrate at Rubin after joining them from Krasnodar in January.

DUSAN VLAHOVIC

(Fiorentina)
In his second season with Fiorentina, the 20-year-old has established himself as one of the most talented youngsters in Serie A, scoring important goals against Inter and Napoli, and braces against both Cagliari and Sampdoria.

LUKA IVANUSEC

(Dinamo Zagreb)

In recent years, Lokomotiva Zagreb have seen many of their most promising young talents move across the Croatian capital to Dinamo. Marko Pjaca and Filip Krovinovic made the cross-city switch before joining Juventus and Benfica respectively, while Lovro Majer, Dinamo's current No.10, left Lokomotiva two years ago.

The latest player to tread that path is Ivanusec, a 21-year-old midfielder with energy, an excellent range of passing and the ability to make devastating forward bursts into the box.

Signed after scoring six goals in 2018-19, his first season with the Croatian champions has seen the all-terrain midfielder eased in gently, alternating between the bench and a starting role, yet he has impressed when given the opportunity. In June he scored his fourth goal of the season, in his first start since the league was suspended in March, as Dinamo cruised to their third title in a row.

Last year he was a regular in the first Croatia Under-21 side to reach the European Championship finals since 2004, and he has scored four goals in qualifying for the next edition too. But with that tournament set to finish right before the rescheduled Euro 2020, he could be an outsider for the senior squad instead. He scored in his second full international appearance three years ago, but hasn't played for the seniors since. However, more opportunities are sure to follow if his progress continues in 2020-21.

> **A 21-year-old midfielder with energy, an excellent range of passing and the ability to make devastating forward bursts into the box**

In November, he scored against Shakhtar Donetsk on his first Champions League start with a typical driven finish after linking up with front man Bruno Petkovic. The goal helped Dinamo to a 3-1 lead in the 89th minute, yet they somehow contrived to draw the game 3-3, ensuring a fourth-placed finish in their group and an exit from Europe. Next season, the club have ambitions of staying in Europe beyond Christmas.

Ivanusec is part of an exciting Dinamo side. Having sold Dani Olmo to RB Leipzig for €20 million in January, the club have the finances to resist offers for Croatian internationals Majer, Petkovic and goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic, while Nikola Moro and Antonio Marin are also highly rated.

Having dominated Croatian football for over a decade, 2021 could be the year that Dinamo finally make their mark in Europe. If they do, Ivanusec is sure to play a significant role.

Nick Bidwell

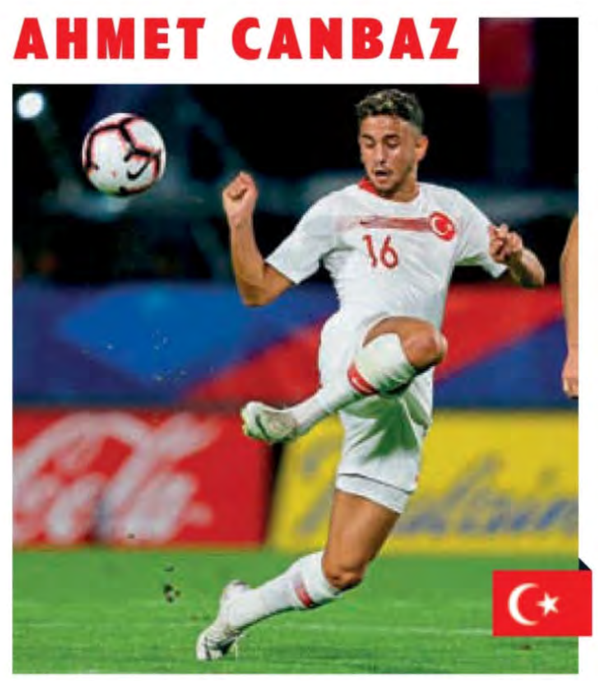
MYKOLA SHAPARENKO

(Dynamo Kiev)
Dynamo fans and Ukraine media observers share a similar standpoint when it comes to Shaparenko, with both groups adamant the 21-year-old midfielder will soon make the transition at Dynamo from hot prospect to confirmed star. A magical dribbler and creator, he has four caps for Ukraine.

KACPER KOZLOWSKI

(Pogon Szczecin)
The right-footed central midfielder played with Pogon's reserves in the Polish fourth tier before making his league debut for the senior side at 15 years old. He could be handed a regular start next term – as long as "The Dockers" can keep hold of him.

AHMET CANBAZ



(Trabzonspor)
Gifted Turkey U21 playmaker, winger and free-kick expert, who first came to prominence when inspiring the Eintracht Braunschweig youth team to the German title in 2017. Moved from Werder Bremen to Trabzonspor last year, only to be struck down by a cruciate-ligament injury.

TIAGO DANTAS

(Benfica)
A quick-thinking and cultured attacking midfielder, he is one of the great hopes of Portuguese football. In fine form this season for Benfica B and with the Under-19s in the UEFA Youth League, he is small and slight but has a wonderful feel for the game with his 'pass and move' simplicity.

MOHAMED TAABOUNI

(AZ)
The 18-year-old attacking midfielder or winger has yet to set foot on an Eredivisie pitch. But whenever he does make his top-flight debut – and it has to be soon – watch out for fireworks. His stock in trade is devastating ball-skills and he has vision to die for. A European champion with the Netherlands Under-17 side in 2019.

NACI UNUVAR

(Ajax)
Sooner or later this diminutive attacking crowd-pleaser is going to have his name up in lights. Whether used as a wide man or a No.10, the 17-year-old Netherlands Under-18 international is nothing less than pure, 100 per cent skill. His potential is limitless.

MAARTEN VANDEVOORDT

(Genk)
Never mind his shaky performance on his Champions League debut against Napoli last December, Genk's 18-year-old keeper has all the qualities of a future international. He is a fine shot-stopper, and very authoritative for one so young.

ASTER VRANCKX

(Mechelen)
Since breaking into the Mechelen first team this year, the 17-year-old central midfielder has gone from strength to strength, so much so that scouts are flocking to the Achter de Kazerne stadium to watch him. Elegant in his approach play, a good ball-winner and brimming with personality.

Glenn Moore

World Cup's joint hosts

Australia-New Zealand bid wins 2023 vote

The ninth Women's World Cup will break all manner of records, not least for distance covered by an expanded field of 32 teams. Spanning five time zones, two nations and more than 3,000 miles, the 2023 finals will take FIFA into previously uncharted territory.

The first female finals in the southern hemisphere will also be the first joint-hosted women's tournament, with Australia and New Zealand's combined candidacy defeating Colombia. They were the last two standing from a nine-strong field when FIFA convened electronically in late June to determine the hosts.

In the end the vote was comfortable, and deservedly so. After issues with the Japan-South Korea men's World Cup in 2002, FIFA has reservations about joint-hosting. But Australia and New Zealand share a common language and heritage, and have previously joint-hosted men's cricket and rugby union world cups with success. There were also financial concerns about the efficacy of Colombia's proposal.

However, the winners endured a nervous build-up as the news leaked out that UEFA were likely to vote en bloc for Colombia. They did – even England's FA, to their Commonwealth partners' disgust – but Africa and CONCACAF backed the Asia-Oceania bid and Australia-New Zealand ultimately won the FIFA Council vote 22-13. While this was a victory for FIFA reforms, with bid quality the decisive factor rather than the backroom *realpolitik* of the past, Gianni Infantino indicated the 2027 vote may go before the full Congress, as the men's vote now does.

It was in the early hours of the morning Down Under when the president revealed the news. In response the sails of Sydney's famous Opera House were lit up with an image of Australian striker Sam Kerr's trademark backflip. "We did it. We freaking did it," said the Chelsea striker of the vote. Kerr, who is likely to be the face of the finals, is emblematic of social changes that Australia hopes to accelerate by staging the tournament. The country still has lingering issues of race and misogyny, yet the 26-year-old, who is gay and of mixed-heritage (her father is Anglo-Indian), is one of the most feted athletes of a sports-mad nation.

For New Zealand, the event will follow the hosting of women's rugby and cricket world cups in 2021. Auckland's Eden Park, home of All Blacks rugby, is planned to launch the event with four other Kiwi host cities proposed.

Australia has proposed eight venues, two of them in Sydney with the final at Stadium Australia, where Cathy Freeman lit up the 2000 Olympics. The Matildas will hope to follow her lead and that of Australia's women cricketers who won this year's World T20 in front of 86,174 spectators in Melbourne. In reality, several stadia are likely to be cut with Launceston, Adelaide, Perth, Christchurch and Hamilton most vulnerable.

> Australia and New Zealand share a common language and heritage, and have previously joint-hosted men's cricket and rugby union world cups with success

The winning bid was aided by Infantino's contentious decision in mid 2019 to increase the finals from 24 to 32 teams. This reduced the field and lengthened the process leaving the victors a tight three-year time-span to get ready.

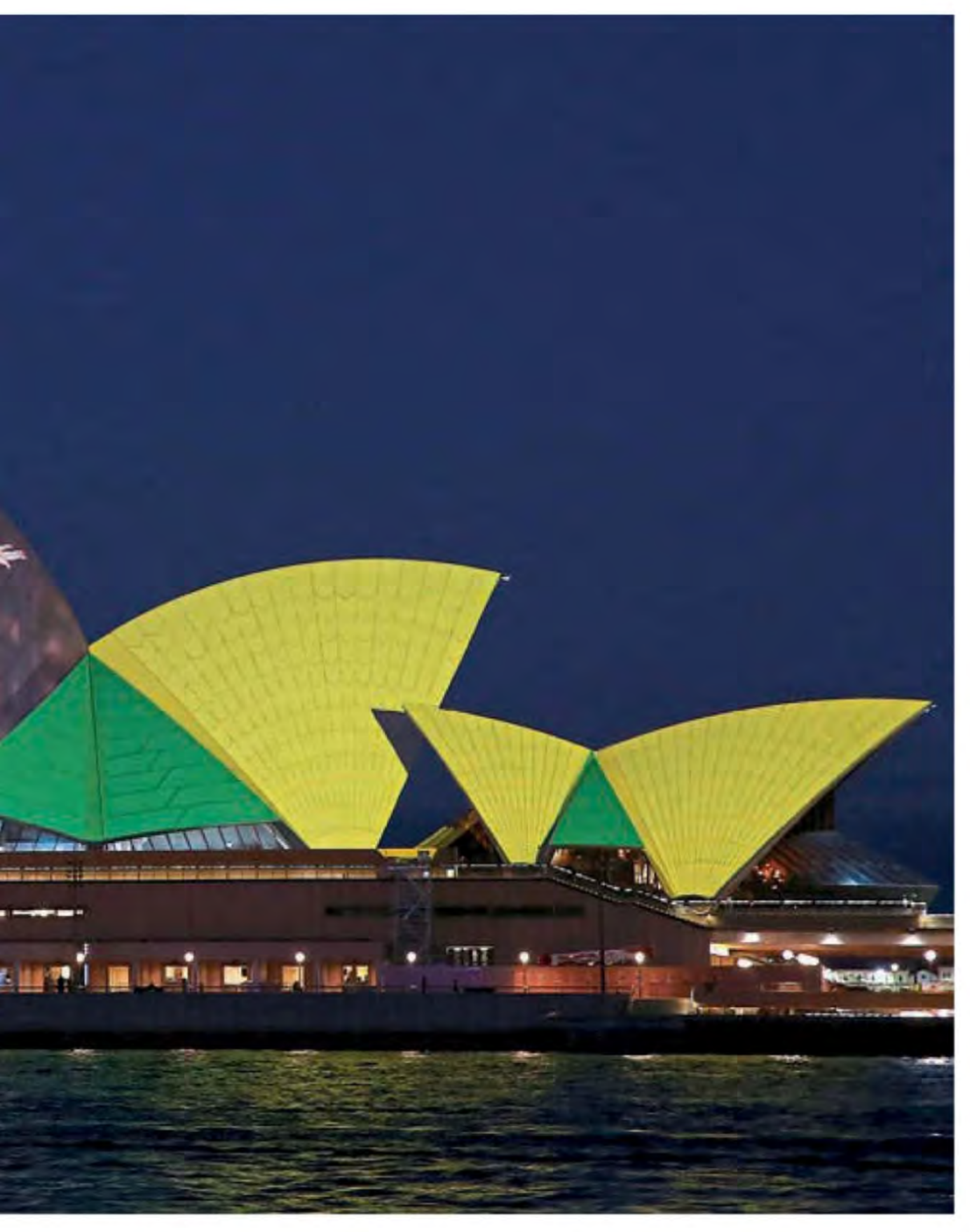
Those constraints helped knock out Argentina, Bolivia, South Africa and South Korea (potentially in conjunction with North Korea) before the December deadline to submit formal bids. Australia and New Zealand combined leaving four applications.

Victorious... Australia and New Zealand's players and coaches, from left to right: Steph Catley, Ante Milicic, Tom Sermanni and Rebekah Stott

Brazil pulled out in early June, two days before FIFA's evaluation report was published, blaming the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Japan withdrew three days before the vote arguing FIFA was unlikely to grant it two major tournaments in three years (the Olympics having been put back to 2021).

That left a straight fight with CONMEBOL's Colombia. The winning bid had the advantage of doing significantly better in the evaluation, scoring 4.1 out of 5, compared to Colombia's 2.8 (Japan scored 3.9). Australia-New Zealand scored better in every category and was regarded as commercially the best option of the three. Colombia's bid was deemed a "high risk" commercially and would need "a significant amount of investment" which it was "not clear" would "be available".

Final host...Stadium Australia



Sydney Opera House... lit up to celebrate the announcement

In the past, notably with Qatar 2022, FIFA's executive voters have not taken much notice of these reports, but the phrase "high risk commercially" would have rung alarm bells even without reforms to the selection process. The fact many of Colombia's female players went unpaid when their fledgling league was postponed because of the pandemic did not help their case. Nor did a sexual abuse controversy that included the conviction of national U17s coach Didier Luna for repeated sexual harassment of the team physio. Australia's W-League, while only enjoying a short season, and with wide salary variation, is well established and features many globally known players.

Though UEFA's bloc vote was widely viewed as resulting from a close relationship with CONMEBOL, their Memorandum of Understanding having been renewed in February, the federation insisted they wanted to grow the women's game in South America. There is certainly much to do in this respect – several women's teams went more than a year without a match after the 2016 Olympics, including Colombia's. However, with the 2027 finals likely to go to Africa or South America the opportunity is there for a nation to lead the way in a continent where women's football has struggled to make way amid a culture of machismo. Colombia, ranked 22nd in the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender gap report (one place behind the UK, 21 ahead of Australia), may be best-placed to build on this bid and do so.

Round-up

Bundesliga winners... Wolfsburg

WOLFSBURG, CHELSEA AND BARCELONA CHAMPIONS

The Bundesliga was Europe's only major women's league to resume after the COVID-19 suspension enabling Wolfsburg, led by the goals of Pernille Harder, to wrap up their fourth successive title. Emergency funding from the German men's clubs facilitated resumption, but similar largesse was absent elsewhere with campaigns curtailed.

In England, points-per-game was used to determine final standings, with Chelsea leapfrogging Manchester City to regain the title from Arsenal, who finished third. Liverpool, champions in 2013 and 2014, were relegated, an embarrassing counterpoint to the success of their men. Aston Villa will replace them.

There was no need for arithmetic in Spain, even with nine matches left. Unbeaten Barcelona, nine points clear of Atletico Madrid with 19 wins and two draws, were declared champions. The league is to be expanded from 16 to 18 clubs next season sparing the bottom two, Valencia and Espanyol, from relegation.

In Serie A, Juventus were eventually declared champions by the Italian Football Federation, with runners-up Fiorentina joining them in next season's Champions League. The Portuguese league was abandoned – Benfica and Sporting were neck-and-neck – while Lyon had already been declared French champions.

Host...Bilbao's San Mames stadium

BASQUE COUNTRY TO HOST CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

The UEFA Women's Champions League, suspended at the last-eight stage, will conclude as a mini-tournament in Bilbao and San Sebastian from August 21-30. The quarter-final draw will feature Atletico Madrid v Barcelona, Lyon v Bayern Munich, Glasgow City v Wolfsburg and Arsenal v Paris Saint-Germain.

Staying put... Lyon's Dzsenifer Marozsan

INS & OUTS

A flurry of transfers took place at the opening of the summer window. However, the impact of COVID-19 meant Dzsenifer Marozsan and Sarah Bouhaddi aborted their moves to Utah Royals to remain with Lyon.

Player	Nationality	Transfer
Ellie Carpenter	*Australia*	*Portland to Lyon*
Lena Oberdorf	*Germany*	*Essen to Wolfsburg*
Melanie Leupolz	*Germany*	*Bayern Munich to Chelsea*
Eve Perisset	*France*	*Paris Saint-Germain to Bordeaux*
Stefanie van der Gragt	*Netherlands*	*Barcelona to Ajax*

Coaching moves included former Wales international Gareth Taylor's appointment as Manchester City manager, while Kenneth Heiner-Moller left Canada.

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Omonia Nicosia...denied title despite being top

MAY 7-JUNE 25, 2020

Global diary

Stories from the four corners of the football world

Thursday May 7

SOMALIA: Goalkeeping coach for Somalia's national youth team, former international Abdiwali Olad Kanyare is shot dead in a mosque in the town of Afgoye, 30km south of the capital Mogadishu.

Friday May 8

IFAB: The International Football Association Board agrees to a temporary amendment to the Laws of the Game to allow five substitutions per team. However, to avoid disruption, each team will only have three opportunities to make substitutions during play.

Monday May 11

BELARUS: The only country in Europe to continue playing, the Premier League game between FC Minsk and Neman Grodno is postponed following suspected COVID-19 cases among the home team.
BELGIUM: City Football Group, who own Manchester City among others, complete a deal to buy Belgian second-tier side Lommel SK.
CHINA: Said to be heavily in debt, Tianjin Tianhai submit an application to withdraw from the forthcoming Chinese Super League, with Shenzhen FC set to earn a reprieve from relegation.
ITALY: Andrea Rinaldi, a 19-year-old on loan at Legnano from Atalanta, dies three days after suffering a brain aneurysm.

Wednesday May 13

PORTUGAL: Primeira Liga side Santa Clara are forced to play their home games 892 miles away at the Portuguese Football Federation headquarters due to restrictions in the Azores.

Friday May 15

BELGIUM: Club Brugge are declared champions as the Pro League decides to end the season. They will enter next season's Champions League, along with runners-up Gent, while Waasland-Beveren are relegated.

Saturday May 16

GERMANY: The Bundesliga is the first major European league to return to action, with Erling Haaland getting the first goal after the restart as Borussia Dortmund beat Schalke 4-0 in an empty stadium.

Monday May 18

SOUTH AFRICA: Captain of top-flight side Golden Arrows, Nkanyiso Mngwengwe dies in hospital due to heart failure.

Tuesday May 19

SPAIN: Segunda Division side Malaga become the first club in Spain to initiate collective redundancy, terminating or suspending the contracts of all players and staff.

Wednesday May 20

BELGIUM: Roberto Martinez extends his contract as national coach until 2022.
UGANDA: Kampala-based Vipers SC are declared champions for the fourth time in their history.

Friday May 22

MEXICO: The remainder of the Clausura season is cancelled with no champion being crowned for the first time. Seeking their first league title since 1997, Cruz Azul were top with seven games left to play.

Off the mark... Erling Haaland scores the Bundesliga's first goal after the restart

Saturday May 23

HUNGARY: Top-of-the-table Ferencvaros come from behind to beat Debrecen 2-1 as league action returns.

Welcome...City Group's newest side, Lommel SK

VIETNAM: Nam Dinh beat Hoang Anh Gia Lai 2-0 in the cup as Vietnam becomes the first Southeast Asian nation to return to action.

Sunday May 24

BELARUS: BATE Borisov beat Dinamo Brest 1-0 with a goal from Zakhar Volkov in the last minute of extra time to win the Belarus Cup.
GERMANY: Timo Werner gets a hat-trick in a 5-0 victory over Mainz to become RB Leipzig's all-time top scorer with 91 goals.
ROMANIA: Universitatea Cluj's Cameroonian midfielder Joseph Bouasse dies from a heart attack aged 21.

Tuesday May 26

GERMANY: Joshua Kimmich scores the only goal of *Der Klassiker* as Bayern Munich win 1-0 at Borussia Dortmund to open up a seven-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga with six games left to play.

Thursday May 28

AUSTRIA: League leaders LASK Linz are docked six points for conducting team training sessions in violation of pandemic restrictions ahead of the resumption of the Austrian Bundesliga on June 2.
DENMARK: The Superliga restarts with AGF and Randers drawing 1-1 in an empty stadium, but with thousands of fans logged onto video software, displaying their faces on screens one side of the pitch in a "virtual grandstand".

Friday May 29

AUSTRIA: Red Bull Salzburg retain the Austrian Cup with a 5-0 victory over SC Austria Lustenau.
SERBIA: As the SuperLiga restarts, Red Star win 5-0 at Rad Belgrade to secure a third consecutive title.

Sunday May 31

UKRAINE: Karpaty's home game against Mariupol is postponed after 25 players and staff test positive for coronavirus. The league had only restarted the previous day.

Tuesday June 2

MEXICO: The owners of Liga MX side CA Monarcas Morelia ask the Mexican league to sanction a move to Mazatlan in the state of Sinaloa next season, with reports suggesting that they will be renamed Mazatlan FC.

Wednesday June 3

HUNGARY: Budapest Honved beat Mezokovesd 2-1 with goals from Ivran Lovric and Djordje Kamber to win the Hungarian Cup for the eighth time. ➤

South Korea

JOHN DUERDEN

K-League leads football's return

The first league to attempt a return to normality

South Korea's K-League has had a spring to remember, a period unparalleled in its 37-year history. On May 8, Jeonbuk Motors and Suwon Bluewings met at Jeonju World Cup Stadium, with the champions taking on the cup holders. But there was little that was familiar in this traditional season-opening fixture.

In a league that started the year struggling to find a decent domestic broadcasting deal, no less than 19 million people around the world watched former Middlesbrough striker and record K-League goalscorer Lee Dong-gook head the only goal of the game for Jeonbuk with six minutes remaining. Three million followed on official Twitter and YouTube accounts, with the rest watching in the 36 countries that had purchased broadcasting rights.

The reason for the interest was simple: this was the biggest league in the world to start playing football since coronavirus had brought sport to a halt – and football-hungry fans wanted to watch.

Returning...Jeonbuk Motors take on Suwon Bluewings

Of course, there were no fans in the stadium. Those who were allowed in had to wear masks – except for those playing, officiating or warming up – and all had their temperatures taken upon entry. There were no handshakes and spitting was prohibited, while deliberate and repeated shouting and talking in close proximity was discouraged and could be punished if authorities saw fit. Fan sounds and chants are piped in and selected to coincide with the action on the pitch.

> In a league that started the year struggling to find a decent domestic broadcasting deal, no less than 19 million people around the world watched

If there was unprecedented international interest in the opening round of games then it reached another level a week later. FC Seoul, 2016 champions and disliked in the country for relocating from the city of Anyang to the capital in 2004 to make use of the vacant World Cup Stadium, were at the centre of a bizarre story. The 66,000-capacity arena was obviously empty for the visit of Gwangju FC and so, for the first home game of the season, Seoul wanted to boost the atmosphere by installing some mannequins in the usual cheering area behind the home goal.

A local business, with a CEO that supported the club, offered to help and provided around 25 life-sized and mostly female dolls. These were dressed in club colours, sat two metres apart and wore masks. But as the game kicked off and was followed by fans at home, it became apparent that these dolls were of the adult variety. Some were even holding banners that expressed messages of support to players but also referenced adult performers.

The story grew quickly on social media and soon after the game the club issued an official apology, claiming that there had been a misunderstanding with the supplier and that they did not know the true nature of the dolls. It did little to stem the story at home or abroad. For the second straight weekend, the domestic media was full of reports of major international reaction to South Korea's football scene.

K-League officials had been basking in a rare wave of positive international publicity and were furious. A record 100 million won ($81,000) fine was handed out for damaging the prestige of the competition, and Seoul "humbly accepted" the punishment and urged the police to investigate the suppliers.

It should be that the sterling work done by the country and the league in starting before almost all others will be remembered long after the "sex doll scandal" is forgotten. A second wave of infections has recently been confirmed, yet the numbers are still relatively minor compared with other nations. Having already reduced the number of matches from 38 to 27, the K-League has said there is scope for it to be reduced to 22 in order to complete the season. There is a lot that the rest of the world could learn from South Korea.

K-League poster boy... Lee Dong-gook

Thursday June 4

PORTUGAL: Two Benfica players, Julian Weigl and Andrija Zivkovic, are taken to hospital with minor injuries after their team bus is stoned following the side's goalless draw at home to Tondela.
USA: NBA star Kevin Durant of the Brooklyn Nets buys a minority stake in MLS club Philadelphia Union, estimated to be between one and five per cent.

Sunday June 7

CHINA: Six unnamed members of the national Under-19 squad are suspended for six months for violating coronavirus measures by leaving a training camp in Shanghai to go drinking.

Tuesday June 9

ITALY: After reportedly being sacked by Brescia at the weekend, Mario Balotelli is turned away when he arrives for training.

Wednesday June 10

SPAIN: A Segunda Division game, which started in December before being stopped because of offensive chanting, is completed 179 days later with Rayo Vallecano beating Albacete 1-0.

Thursday June 11

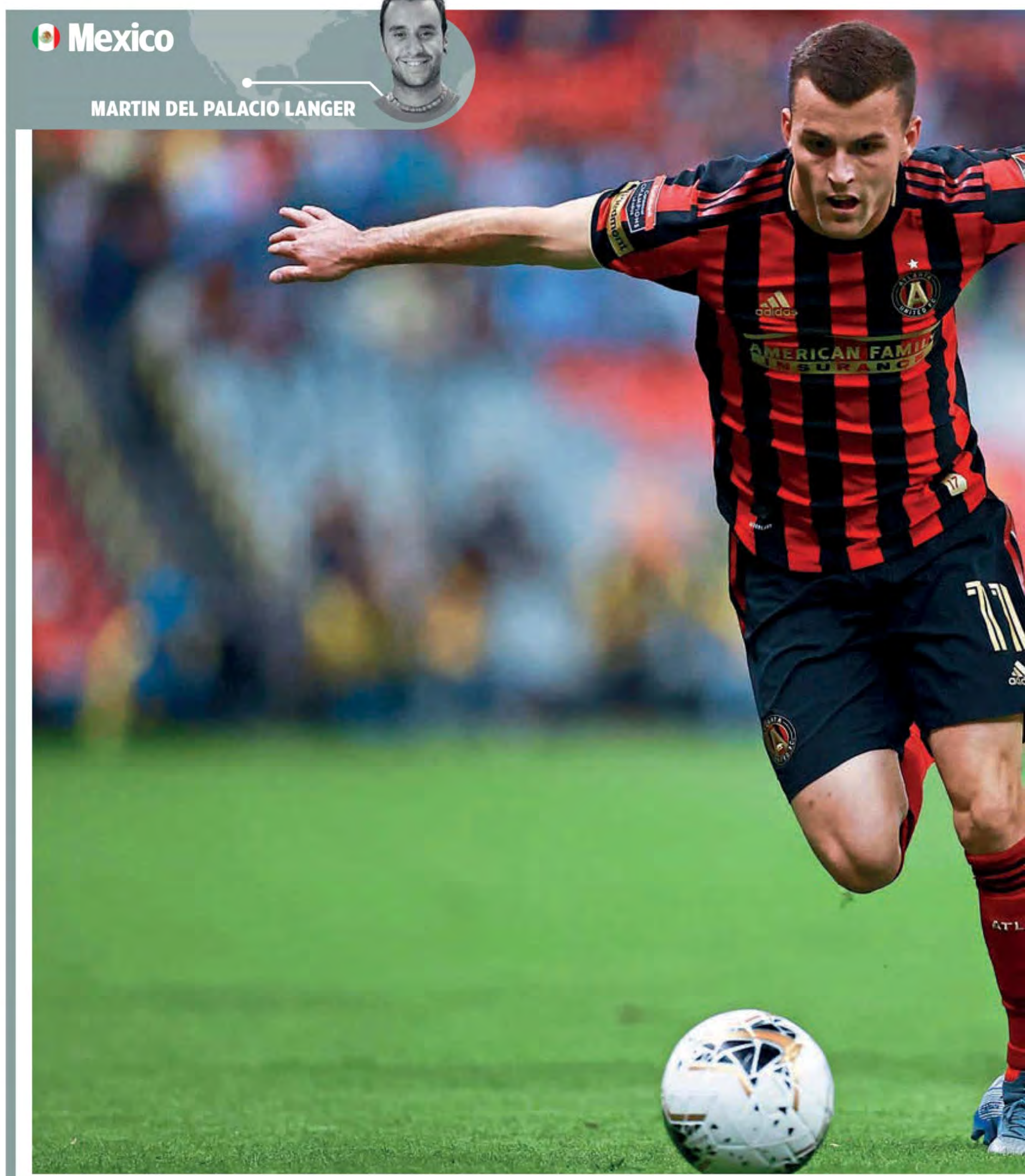
SPAIN: Sevilla beat Real Betis 2-0 in the Seville derby as La Liga returns after a three-month gap.

Saturday June 13

GERMANY: Paderborn midfielder Klaus Gjasula breaks a Bundesliga record by picking up his 17th yellow card, eclipsing the previous record set by former Schalke defender Tomasz Hajto.
SOUTH AFRICA: Second-tier side Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila FC announce they have bought the franchise of top-tier Bidvest Wits and will be relocating the club to Limpopo under a new name.

Monday June 15

CHINA: Tibet's only professional football team is the latest in a string of Chinese clubs to fold, following a row over hosting matches in one of the highest cities in the world. Third-tier Lhasa Chengtou managed to play only two games at home, at an altitude of 12,000 feet, and on both occasions the referee had to stop play every 15 minutes to let the players breathe bottled oxygen. ➤



Money driving MLS and Liga MX merger

Plans to create a North American super league on the horizon

On April 18, after several days of speculation, Liga MX president Enrique Bonilla announced that the Mexican top flight will suspend promotion and relegation for the next five seasons. Ascenso MX, as the second tier was known, will disappear and give way to Expansion MX, which will essentially be a glorified Under-23 tournament.

This news – surprising in itself for anyone who is not Mexican – is actually one more step towards an even more shocking plan which haunts the minds of some leaders of Mexican football: to join Liga MX with MLS and create a North American super league.

The reason, as might be expected, is economic. Liga MX is by far the most popular league in the United States. In 2018 it registered an audience of

USA v Mexico... Atlanta United meet Club America in the CONCACAF Champions League

105 million viewers, against 36 million for the English Premier League and 29 million for MLS. In addition, Mexico's national team routinely plays between five and seven friendlies a year north of the border, each registering absolute sell-outs regardless of the level of the opposition.

And those numbers have a group of Liga MX club owners – led by Alejandro Irarragorri, a businessman who owns shares in both Santos Laguna and Atlas – salivating at the prospect of taking their teams to US stadiums week-in, week-out, with the corresponding influx of US dollars that the crowds would represent.

After the announcement of the disappearance of Ascenso MX, Irarragorri issued a statement justifying the decision and conspicuously citing MLS as an example of a league that thrives despite not having a promotion-and-relegation system, stating: "A high percentage of the income of Mexican football comes from the USA. Their league has grown in an orderly, slow but constant way...its fundamental aspects are solid and its market is very large, relevant in purchasing power and growing in its appetite for soccer."

Despite the entrepreneur's evident enthusiasm, the union between the two leagues faces several obstacles, which may become an insurmountable chasm that ends the project before it even begins.

The first is the popular rejection in Mexico of the initiative. After the statement, various characters from the world of Mexican football declared themselves against it. Among them, former national coach and current Toluca boss Jose Manuel de la Torre said: "It would be very difficult to do because the leagues are handled differently, and they have very different sporting and marketing interests."

Another argument is the difference in quality between the two leagues. No MLS team has been able to win the CONCACAF Champions League since 2000, a period in which Liga MX's sides have done so 16 times – the last 14 in a row. Opponents of the measure fear it will be a sporting step back for Mexican teams.

There is also rejection on the other side of the border. Herculez Gomez, a former USA striker of Mexican-American parents and current ESPN commentator, asked: "Perhaps the first five years will be good for MLS, due to the popularity of the Mexican teams. But then what? What do MLS clubs have to gain? This would be a marriage for life, there would be no possibility of divorce."

> "Perhaps the first five years will be good for MLS, due to the popularity of the Mexican teams. But then what?"
> Ex-USA striker Herculez Gomez

There are also important logistical problems. Firstly, there are the distances, with 4,029 kilometres separating the cities of Puebla and Vancouver, for example, and no direct flights between the two. Then there is the matter of immigration conditions between the two countries, which have never been easy, even before the latest restrictions imposed by the Trump administration.

Victor Montagliani, president of CONCACAF, whose approval would be necessary for any union, put the apparent last nail in the coffin when he recently said: "I think MLS and Liga MX should have other needs and concerns right now, and we also have the CONCACAF Champions League which prominently features teams from both countries."

But none of this will stop the two leagues in their attempts to at least get as close as possible. Last year they launched the Leagues Cup project, a bi-national tournament with the participation of eight teams, four per country. The idea was to expand it to 16 and then to 32 by 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a provisional stop to that idea, but there is no doubt that its promoters will come roaring back as soon as possible.

The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is just too bright to resist.

Leading the calls...Alejandro Irarragorri

Tuesday June 16

ENGLAND: The government agrees to extend its free school meals voucher system following a campaign by Manchester United striker Marcus Rashford.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich clinch an eighth successive Bundesliga title with a 1-0 win at Werder Bremen. Paderborn are relegated, and will be replaced by Arminia Bielefeld.

Wednesday June 17

ENGLAND: After a 100-day absence, the Premier League returns with controversy as Hawk-Eye – the operator of the competition's goal-line technology system – has to apologise for an error that rules out a legitimate Sheffield United goal in their 0-0 draw at Aston Villa.
ITALY: Napoli win a first major trophy in six seasons, beating Juventus in a penalty shoot-out in the Coppa Italia Final after a goalless 90 minutes.

Friday June 19

RUSSIA: With their entire first team quarantined after six players tested positive for COVID-19, fourth-placed Rostov play a makeshift team of teenagers and lose 10-1 away at Sochi. The visitors' 17-year-old keeper Denis Popov is named man of the match and sets a Russian Premier League record by making 15 saves.

Sunday June 21

ENGLAND: The 0-0 draw between Everton and Liverpool is British TV's most-watched Premier League game of all time, with an average of five million people tuning in to Sky.
SPAIN: Sergio Ramos becomes La Liga's all-time top scoring defender with his 68th goal as Real Madrid beat Real Sociedad 2-1 and go top of the table.

Wednesday June 24

ITALY: Lazio throw away a two-goal lead at Atalanta to lose 3-2 and fall four points behind Juventus in the Serie A title race with 11 games to play.

Thursday June 25

ENGLAND: Manchester City are beaten 2-1 by Chelsea, handing the Premier League trophy to Liverpool and ending their 30-year wait for a title.

Cyprus

STEVE MENARY

Anger and accusations

Cypriot league's early curtailment divides opinion

A decision to abandon the season, despite the coronavirus almost disappearing by May, has created schisms in the Cypriot game.

Out of 20 clubs, only Anorthosis Famagusta – second on goal difference to leaders Omonia Nicosia when games stopped in mid-March – and AEK Larnaca, who were chasing a Europa League spot, voted to continue.

Instead, there will be no champions. Omonia enter the Champions League and Anorthosis, APOEL and Apollon go into the Europa League. "Everyone saw their own interest," says Larnaca president Andros Karapatakis. "We were saddened but it was a democratic decision. We want the championship to be judged on the field and we wanted it to continue.

"Every decision is made with the data of the time. Three months ago, when we had 50-60 cases per day, we also said that maybe the championship should not continue. But when we saw that the situation was improving epidemiologically, we said there was no reason not to continue."

In the second tier, leaders Karmiotissa and Ermis Aradippou, who have both come under suspicion for fixing matches this year after their games generated alerts for suspicious betting, will be promoted as the first division is expanded to 14 clubs next season. No clubs will be relegated into the third division.

The deal was slammed by the Pancyprian Footballers Association (PASP), which accused the clubs of taking advantage of the virus to use a government-funded scheme to save money.

According to PASP, most players have been temporarily suspended and not paid by their clubs since the league stopped in mid-March. Instead, players applied to the Full Suspension of Activities scheme, where, depending on their employment history, they can get €1,214 a month from the government.

PASP president Spyros Neofytides says: "We strongly disagree with the decision to cancel the season due to the pandemic. All data available simply did not justify such a move, due to the positive outcome of the battle against the virus, while no time pressure was in place, since the decision was taken on 15 May, a full ten days before the deadline set by UEFA.

"The fact that May 23 was the first day in more than two-and-a-half months that no new cases were found, proves the rashness of the decision by the federation. To make things even worse, the Cyprus government allowed the continuation of training from May 4 and allowed the return to matches, under strict precautions, by June 9.

"The decision for cancellation was made by the clubs, based on their financial interests solely and not for the good of football. They decided against playing football, because they opted to save money from not paying salaries, or at least they believe they will by not playing."

The Cyprus Football Association (CFA) disputes this interpretation, saying the government allowed training to resume on May 18 but without contact until June 8.

"That's why they said that we can restart the championship on June 9. But, as you understand, this was impossible [without contact training before]," said a CFA spokesperson. "Also, the government insisted on a 14-day quarantine of the entire team in case a member of a team was positive on a coronavirus test. So, in the case of a positive tested player, the championship should stop again. The majority of the clubs didn't want to restart the championship without guarantee that it would be finished."

> "We strongly disagree with the decision to cancel the season due to the pandemic. All data available simply did not justify such a move"
> Spyros Neofytides president of the Pancyprian Footballers Association

Exception...only Anorthosis and AEK Larnaca wanted to continue

Omonia wanted to restart but switched position after the 14-day rule was introduced, says communications manager Andreas Demetriou, who adds that a ban on accessing indoor facilities in a country where summer temperatures exceed 40 degrees celsius made proper post-game rehabilitation impossible.

Photos credit: Savvides Press

Top of the league... Omonia were chasing their first title since 2010

As the best-supported club, Omonia lost gate money but attendances at APOEL, AEL and Apollon have been hit by the introduction of a fan ID system. Attendances are low at most other clubs and the biggest income is TV money, which had mostly been distributed before the lockdown began.

The cancellation has been unpopular amongst supporters. Two thirds of respondents to a poll by leading website *Kerkida* wanted the season to finish.

"For fans, the decision to suspend the league was very disappointing," says Christos Zavallis from the supporters' trust at reigning champions APOEL. "There were nine games to go, with everything up for grabs and four teams in a competitive position.

"Our team APOEL should be the team pressing more than everyone for the league to continue but mysteriously that was not the case. While we suspended our league, other countries that are in much more difficult situations in terms of managing the pandemic, are continuing."

For the first time since 2012-13, APOEL will not take part in the Champions League but football could be the biggest loser as the game goes into a self-imposed five-month break before trying to resume on August 22.

Club football

All concluded league tables.
Champions (C), relegated (R) and if null and void, no (C) and (R) included.

EUROPE

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge (C)	29	21	7	1	58	14	70
Gent	29	16	7	6	59	34	55
Charleroi	29	15	9	5	49	23	54
Antwerp	29	15	8	6	49	32	53
Standard Liege	29	14	7	8	47	32	49
Mechelen	29	13	5	11	46	43	44
Genk	29	13	5	11	45	42	44
Anderlecht	29	11	10	8	45	29	43
Zulte-Waregem	29	10	6	13	41	49	36
Mouscron	29	9	9	11	38	40	36
Kortrijk	29	9	6	14	40	44	33
Sint-Truiden	29	9	6	14	33	50	33
AS Eupen	29	8	6	15	28	51	30
Cercle Brugge	29	7	2	20	27	54	23
KV Oostende	29	6	4	19	29	58	22
Waasland-Beveren (R)	29	5	5	19	21	60	20

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FK Sarajevo (C)	22	13	6	3	38	19	45
Zeljeznicar	22	12	6	4	43	21	42
Zrinjski	22	11	5	6	30	12	38
Borac Banja Luka	22	10	6	6	29	23	36
Tuzla City	22	10	5	7	27	29	35
Radnik Bijeljina	22	10	4	8	34	21	34
Siroki Brijeg	22	8	8	6	31	26	32
Velez	22	9	5	8	25	23	32
Sloboda Tuzla	22	4	9	9	21	35	21
Mladost DK	22	4	6	12	21	35	18
Celik Zenica (R)	22	5	5	12	17	33	17
Zvijezda 09 (R)	22	1	5	16	12	51	8

CYPRUS
Championship Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Omonia Nicosia	23	13	7	3	34	13	46
Anorthosis	23	14	4	5	45	21	46
APOEL	23	11	7	5	36	16	40
Apollon	23	12	3	8	39	30	39
AEK Larnaca	23	9	8	6	36	29	35
AEL	23	8	7	8	27	29	31

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pafos	23	8	6	9	26	28	30
Nea Salamis	23	7	5	11	27	38	26
Olympiakos Nicosia	23	5	10	8	28	35	25
Enosis	23	5	8	10	29	43	23
Ethnikos Achna	23	5	6	12	31	46	21
Doxa	23	3	5	15	15	45	14

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG (C)	27	22	2	3	75	24	68
Marseille	28	16	8	4	41	29	56
Rennes	28	15	5	8	38	24	50
Lille	28	15	4	9	35	27	49
Nice	28	11	8	9	41	38	41
Reims	28	10	11	7	26	21	41
Lyon	28	11	7	10	42	27	40
Montpellier	28	11	7	10	35	34	40
Monaco	28	11	7	10	44	44	40
Strasbourg	27	11	5	11	32	32	38
Angers	28	11	6	11	28	33	39
Bordeaux	28	9	10	9	40	34	37
Nantes	28	11	4	13	28	31	37
Brest	28	8	10	10	34	37	34
Metz	28	8	10	10	27	35	34
Dijon	28	7	9	12	27	37	30
St-Etienne	28	8	6	14	29	45	30
Nimes	28	7	6	15	29	44	27
Amiens (R)	28	4	11	13	31	50	23
Toulouse (R)	28	3	4	21	22	58	13

GIBRALTAR
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Europa	17	16	1	0	85	9	49
St Joseph's	17	14	2	1	58	15	44
Lincoln Red Imps	17	13	0	4	68	15	39
Lynx	17	9	2	6	37	30	29
Magpies	17	7	0	10	29	41	21
Lions Gibraltar	17	4	3	10	30	55	15

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mons Calpe	18	10	3	5	49	29	33
Europa Point	18	7	4	7	35	38	25
Manchester 62	18	6	1	11	21	49	19
Boca Juniors	17	4	4	9	30	45	16
Glacis United	17	3	1	13	21	56	10
College 1975	18	0	1	17	18	99	1

LUXEMBOURG

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fola Esch	17	12	3	2	41	17	39
Progres Niederkorn	17	11	4	2	43	17	37
Differdange 03	17	11	2	4	36	25	35
UT Petange	17	10	3	4	34	23	33
F91 Dudelange	17	8	2	7	38	24	26
UNA Strassen	17	7	5	5	30	26	26
Racing	17	6	7	4	32	27	25
Jeunesse Esch	17	5	4	8	24	34	19
Victoria Rosport	17	5	3	9	23	35	18
Etzella Ettelbruck	17	5	2	10	22	34	17
Hostert	17	5	1	11	17	37	16
Mondorf-les-Bains	17	3	6	8	22	28	15
Rodange 91	17	4	3	10	21	37	15
Blue Boys	17	3	3	11	20	39	12

MALTA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Floriana (C)	20	12	5	3	38	15	41
Valletta	20	11	5	4	32	22	38
Hibernians	20	11	4	5	34	20	37
Sirens	20	10	5	5	30	26	35
Birkirkara	20	9	6	5	30	20	33
Gzira United	20	9	5	6	35	19	32
Balzan	20	8	4	8	33	29	28
Mosta	20	9	1	10	29	35	28
Hamrun Spartans	20	6	7	7	24	25	25
Sliema Wanderers	20	7	3	10	24	22	24
Gudja United	20	6	6	8	24	30	24
Santa Lucia	20	6	5	9	24	33	23
Senglea Athletic	20	3	7	10	21	39	16
Tarxien Rainbows	20	1	1	18	18	61	4

NETHERLANDS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	25	18	2	5	68	23	56
AZ	25	18	2	5	54	17	56
Feyenoord	25	14	8	3	50	35	50
PSV	26	14	7	5	54	28	49
Willem II	26	13	5	8	37	34	44
Utrecht	25	12	5	8	50	34	41
Vitesse	26	12	5	9	45	35	41
Heracles	26	10	6	10	40	34	36
Groningen	26	10	5	11	27	26	35
Heerenveen	26	8	9	9	41	41	33
Sparta	26	9	6	11	41	45	33
Emmen	26	9	5	12	32	45	32
VVV	26	8	4	14	24	51	28
Twente	26	7	6	13	34	46	27
PEC Zwolle	26	7	5	14	37	55	26
Fortuna	26	6	8	12	29	52	26
Den Haag	26	4	7	15	25	54	19
RKC	26	4	3	19	27	60	15

NORTH MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vardar	23	13	7	3	33	14	46
Sileks	23	10	6	7	24	21	36
Shkendija	23	10	5	8	38	20	35
Renova	23	9	4	10	25	33	31
Shkupi	23	7	8	8	28	28	29
Makedonija GjP	23	7	8	8	24	28	29
Akademija Pandev	23	7	7	9	20	20	28
Rabotnicki	23	8	4	11	21	29	28
Borec	23	7	6	10	20	31	27
Struga	23	6	7	10	9	28	25

NORTHERN IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Linfield (C)	31	22	3	6	71	24	69
Coleraine	31	19	8	4	64	24	65
Crusaders	31	17	8	6	66	30	59
Cliftonville	31	18	5	8	48	22	59
Glentoran	31	17	7	7	60	33	58
Larne	31	16	8	7	59	29	56
Glenavon	31	10	5	16	46	71	35
Carrick Rangers	31	10	2	19	34	47	32
Dungannon Swifts	31	8	6	17	36	76	30
Ballymena United	31	7	6	18	34	54	27
Warrenpoint Town	31	5	3	23	26	85	18
Institute (R)	31	2	9	20	23	72	15

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic (C)	30	26	2	2	89	19	80
Rangers	29	21	4	4	64	19	67
Motherwell	30	14	4	12	41	38	46
Aberdeen	30	12	9	9	40	36	45
Livingston	30	10	9	11	41	39	39
Hibernian	30	9	10	11	42	49	37
St. Johnstone	29	8	12	9	28	46	36
Kilmarnock	30	9	6	15	31	41	33
St. Mirren	30	7	8	15	24	41	29
Ross County	30	7	8	15	29	60	29
Hamilton	30	6	9	15	30	50	27
Hearts (R)	30	4	11	15	31	52	23

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star Belgrade (C)	30	25	3	2	68	18	78
Partizan	30	20	4	6	69	25	64
Vojvodina	30	19	5	6	47	27	62
Backa Topola	30	17	8	5	59	34	59
Radnicki Nis	30	16	4	10	51	37	52
Cukaricki	30	15	6	9	42	36	51
Spartak Subotica	30	14	4	12	46	48	46
Vozdovac	30	13	6	11	45	41	45
Mladost Lucani	30	13	4	13	31	40	43
Napredak	30	9	6	15	33	41	33
Radnik Surdulica	30	8	7	15	34	50	31
Proleter Novi Sad	30	7	9	14	30	42	30
Javor Ivanjica	30	6	10	14	43	62	28
Indija	30	7	4	19	26	48	25
Rad Beograd	30	4	3	23	23	63	15
Macva Sabac	30	2	7	21	18	53	13

WALES
Championship Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Connah's Quay (C)	26	16	8	2	47	19	56
The New Saints	26	16	4	6	69	27	52
Bala Town	26	15	4	7	53	23	49
Barry Town United	25	12	6	7	35	29	42
Caernarfon Town	26	11	5	10	36	38	38
Newtown	25	10	5	10	25	30	35

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cardiff MU	25	9	8	8	30	29	35
Cefn Druids	25	10	5	10	37	39	35
Aberystwyth	26	7	6	13	36	55	27
Penybont	25	5	6	14	29	48	21
Carmarthen Town (R)	25	4	6	15	28	49	18
Airbus UK (R)	26	4	5	17	28	67	17

AFRICA

ANGOLA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Petro de Luanda	24	16	6	2	41	10	54
Primeiro de Agosto	23	16	3	4	42	13	51
Onze Bravos	23	12	4	7	26	22	40
Desportivo da Huila	22	10	7	5	24	16	37
Sagrada Esperanca	23	9	7	7	21	16	34
Academica do Lobito	22	9	6	7	21	18	33
Recreativo do Libolo	24	9	5	10	25	30	32
Interclube	23	8	7	8	24	23	31
Wiliete	23	7	7	9	20	26	28
Recreativo da Caala	22	8	3	11	16	22	27
Progresso	23	6	4	13	16	29	22
Sporting de Cabinda	19	5	6	8	20	24	21
Cuando Cubango	23	4	8	11	17	27	20
Ferroviario Huambo	23	4	8	11	9	25	20
Santa Rita	23	3	7	13	16	37	16

BURKINA FASO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salitas	24	16	3	5	38	15	51
Majestic	24	13	6	5	30	20	45
Rahimo	24	12	5	7	27	23	41
ASFB	24	11	7	6	30	17	40
Douanes	24	10	7	7	24	19	37
USFA	24	10	5	9	29	24	35
ASFA-Yennenga	24	8	10	6	23	20	34
RC Bobo-Dioulasso	24	8	8	8	22	21	32
SONABEL	24	7	9	8	24	25	30
Etoile Filante	24	7	9	8	23	28	30
ASEC-K	24	6	11	7	17	24	29
KOZAF	24	7	7	10	19	24	28
Royal	24	5	9	10	23	33	24
Ouagadougou	24	5	8	11	19	30	23
RCK	24	6	4	14	16	29	22
Police	24	4	6	14	19	31	18

CAMEROON

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PWD Bamenda (C)	28	13	8	7	36	28	47
Coton Sport	29	12	10	7	39	29	46
Colombe	28	12	9	7	33	27	45
Bamboutos	28	9	14	5	30	22	41
Feutcheu	28	11	8	9	31	27	41
Young Sport Academy	28	11	7	10	39	37	40
Fovu Club	28	11	7	10	29	28	40
Union Douala	28	11	6	11	29	27	39
UMS de Loum	28	10	8	10	23	19	38
Eding Sport	29	11	5	13	30	43	38
APEJES Academy	28	8	13	7	30	33	37
Canon	28	10	6	12	30	30	36
Stade Renard	28	9	8	11	28	24	35
Fortuna Mfou	28	8	10	10	29	25	34
Panthere	28	7	12	9	18	24	33
Avion Academy	28	9	6	13	24	34	33
Tonnerre	28	8	8	12	19	22	32
Dragon de Yaounde	28	7	7	14	25	43	28

CONGO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Otoho d'Oyo (C)	22	17	5	0	40	6	56
Diables Noirs	22	12	6	4	27	15	42
S Talangai	22	12	5	5	34	12	41
Kondzo	22	10	7	5	26	19	37
CARA Brazzaville	22	9	6	7	24	22	33
Etoile du Congo	22	9	5	8	21	24	31
Patronage Saint-Anne	22	7	7	8	21	21	28
V.Club Mokanda	22	7	5	10	17	25	26
Leopards de Dolisie	22	6	8	8	20	31	26
Inter Club	22	5	9	8	18	23	24
Nico-Nicoye	22	5	7	10	21	26	22
RC Brazzavile	22	6	3	13	20	31	21
Cheminots	22	4	8	10	12	23	20
Tongo	22	1	7	14	9	32	10

DR CONGO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe (C)	20	17	2	1	48	9	53
Vita Club	23	13	9	1	40	12	48
Maniema Union	21	14	4	3	42	15	46
Motema Pembe	21	12	6	3	40	16	42
Renaissance	24	11	4	9	32	29	37
Groupe Bazano	19	11	4	4	21	12	37
Rangers	25	6	11	8	27	28	29
RCK	23	6	10	7	25	22	28
Lubumbashi Sport	23	7	6	10	18	20	27
Don Bosco	23	4	13	6	23	23	25
Saint Eloi Lupopo	22	5	9	8	24	25	24
Simba	22	6	4	12	15	31	22
Dauphins Noirs	22	4	6	12	12	32	18
Sanga Balende	19	4	5	10	17	35	17
Bukavu Dawa (R)	23	4	2	17	15	49	14
Nyuki (R)	22	3	3	16	15	57	12

KENYA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gor Mahia (C)	23	17	3	3	47	17	54
Homeboyz	22	14	5	3	45	24	47
Tusker	22	13	7	2	41	21	46
Ulinzi Stars	23	11	10	2	32	15	43
KCB	23	12	6	5	37	20	42
Leopards	23	11	7	5	30	17	40
Western Stima	23	9	9	5	34	27	36
Mathare United	22	8	9	5	33	26	33
Bandari	23	9	5	9	29	27	32
Sofapaka	23	8	7	8	34	29	31
Posta Rangers	23	7	9	7	28	26	30
Kariobangi Sharks	22	4	8	10	27	32	20
Wazito	23	4	8	11	24	30	20
Zoo Kericho	22	4	4	14	23	41	16
Nzoia Sugar	22	2	7	13	18	39	13
Kisumu All Stars	22	2	3	17	13	50	9
Chemelil	23	2	3	18	11	65	9
Sony Sugar* (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Sony Sugar expelled and relegated

MAURITIUS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Grande Riviere Sud	13	9	3	1	24	7	30
Bolton City	13	9	3	1	28	12	30
ASPL 2000	13	6	3	4	20	12	21
ASVP	13	6	2	5	27	17	20
Petite Riviere Noire	12	3	7	2	16	15	16
Pamplemousses	12	4	3	5	15	15	15
Entente Boulet Rouge	13	3	4	6	26	31	13
La Cure Sylvester	13	4	0	9	14	30	12
Cercle de Joachim	13	2	4	7	11	24	10
Savanne	13	2	3	8	21	39	9

RWANDA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APR (C)	23	17	6	0	44	11	57
Rayon Sports	24	15	6	3	38	16	51
Police	23	12	7	4	33	21	43
Mukura	24	12	5	7	37	29	41
Kiyovu Sports	23	10	5	8	30	20	35
AS Kigali	23	7	12	4	21	20	33
Sunrise	24	7	10	7	39	35	31
Bugesera	24	8	6	10	31	32	30
Gasogi United	24	7	9	8	22	23	30
Marines	23	7	7	9	18	24	28
Musanze	24	5	12	7	22	28	27
Muhanga	23	7	6	10	15	21	27
Etincelles	23	5	9	9	19	25	24
Espoir	23	4	5	14	20	40	17
Heroes (R)	24	4	5	15	19	43	17
Gicumbi (R)	24	4	4	16	19	39	16

TOGO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ASKO Kara (C)	20	11	6	3	22	11	39
Unisport	20	9	6	5	19	19	33
Kara	20	8	6	6	22	16	30
OTR	20	8	5	7	15	12	29
Dynamic Togolais	20	8	5	7	21	17	29
Gbohloe-su des Lacs	20	7	7	6	18	16	28
Sara Sport	20	7	6	7	16	16	27
Togo Port	20	6	9	5	21	18	27
Gomido	20	7	5	8	12	13	26
Semassi	20	5	10	5	19	14	25
Ifodje	20	6	6	8	15	15	24
Anges Notse	20	5	8	7	12	16	23
Koroki	20	4	6	10	10	24	18
Maranatha Fiokpo	20	3	7	10	9	24	16

UGANDA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vipers (C)	25	16	6	3	38	15	54
KCCA	25	15	5	5	42	21	50
SC Villa	25	13	7	5	33	21	46
Busoga United	25	13	3	9	30	22	42
URA	25	10	10	5	29	22	40
BUL	25	10	6	9	31	25	36
Mbarara City	25	10	6	9	29	27	36
Onduparaka	25	9	4	12	30	28	31
Express	25	9	4	12	30	37	31
Wakiso Giants	25	8	6	11	24	27	30
Kyetume	25	9	3	13	24	37	30
Bright Stars	25	7	8	10	24	28	29
Police	25	8	4	13	30	37	25
Maroons (R)	25	6	6	13	26	41	24
Proline (R)	25	8	4	13	18	38	22
Tooro United (R)	25	6	4	15	18	39	22

ASIA

PALESTINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Markaz Balatah (C)	22	15	6	1	50	18	51
Shabab Al Am'ari	22	12	8	2	43	17	44
Ahli Al Khalil	22	12	5	5	31	20	41
Shabab Al Khaleel	22	10	6	6	39	24	36
Hilal Al Quds	22	9	7	6	31	22	34
Al Birah	22	8	9	5	30	23	33
Shabab Alsamu	22	9	5	8	36	29	32
Jabal Al Mukaber	22	7	6	9	33	35	27
Taraji Wadi Al Nes	22	6	6	10	23	35	24
Thaqafi Tulkarem	22	3	8	11	21	31	17
Al Ahli Qalqilya (R)	22	2	8	12	22	47	14
Al Quwaat (R)	22	0	4	18	10	68	4

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shabab Al Ahli	19	13	4	2	41	13	43
Al Ain	19	11	4	4	46	21	37
Al Jazira	19	11	3	5	29	17	36
Al Wahda	19	11	2	6	33	30	35
Sharjah	19	10	5	4	38	23	35
Al Nasr	19	9	4	6	24	19	31
Al Wasl	19	8	5	6	31	33	29
Al Dhafra	19	9	2	8	25	24	29
Bani Yas	19	6	5	8	21	27	23
Ajman	19	4	6	9	25	39	18
Kalba	19	5	1	13	24	39	16
Khorfakkan	19	3	6	10	18	32	15
Hatta	19	3	4	12	15	32	13
Fujairah	19	3	3	13	15	36	12

CONCACAF

EL SALVADOR Clausura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Once Deportivo	11	6	2	3	12	7	20
El Vencedor	11	5	4	2	13	8	19
Alianza	11	4	4	3	15	13	16
Independiente	11	3	6	2	8	8	15
FAS	11	5	0	6	8	9	15
Isidro Metapan	11	4	3	4	5	7	15
Municipal Limeno	11	3	5	3	15	12	14
Aguila	11	3	5	3	5	6	14
Jocoro	11	3	4	4	20	19	13
Santa Tecla	11	2	5	4	11	13	11
Sonsonate	11	2	5	4	12	17	11
Chalatenango	11	2	5	4	8	13	11

GUATEMALA Clausura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Comunicaciones	13	8	4	1	26	15	28
Municipal	13	6	5	2	17	12	23
Guastatoya	13	6	3	4	13	10	21
Iztapa	13	5	5	3	19	18	20
Antigua GFC	13	5	4	4	15	11	19
Siquinala	13	4	4	5	17	17	16
Mixco	13	4	3	6	14	14	15
Santa Lucia	13	3	6	4	13	18	15
Xelaju	13	2	7	4	12	15	13
Malacateco	13	3	4	6	9	14	13
Deportivo Sanarate*	13	4	3	6	13	17	12
Coban Imperial	13	2	4	7	8	15	10

Deportivo Sanarate deducted three points

HONDURAS Clausura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Motagua	13	8	3	2	25	10	27
Marathon	13	7	3	3	25	18	24
Olimpia	13	6	4	3	26	15	22
Real Espana	13	7	0	6	20	13	21
Vida	12	3	8	1	13	10	17
Real de Minas	13	5	2	6	16	18	17
Real Sociedad	12	3	5	4	13	17	14
Platense	13	3	3	7	16	24	12
UPNFM	13	1	7	5	8	18	10
Honduras Progreso	13	1	5	7	10	29	8

JAMAICA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waterhouse	29	15	9	5	50	27	54
Mount Pleasant	29	16	5	8	43	22	53
Portmore United	28	14	4	10	38	28	46
Humble Lions	28	12	10	6	30	23	46
Tivoli Gardens	29	12	7	10	39	34	43
Dunbeholden	29	12	7	10	34	30	43
Arnett Gardens	29	11	9	9	40	42	42
Cavalier	29	10	9	10	41	33	39
Harbour View	29	10	9	10	29	35	39
Molynes United	29	8	5	16	30	47	29
UWI	29	2	12	15	26	51	18
Vere United	29	2	12	15	19	47	18

MEXICO Torneo Clausura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruz Azul	10	7	1	2	24	14	22
Leon	10	7	0	3	23	14	21
Santos Laguna	10	5	2	3	14	14	17
America	10	5	2	3	11	11	17
Guadalajara	10	4	4	2	13	11	16
Pumas UNAM	10	4	3	3	20	19	15
Tigres UANL	10	4	2	4	13	10	14
Juarez	10	4	2	4	20	18	14
Morelia	10	4	2	4	17	16	14
Puebla	10	4	2	4	7	7	14
Pachuca	10	4	2	4	11	12	14
Queretaro	10	4	2	4	13	15	14
Atletico San Luis	10	3	4	3	11	15	13
Necaxa	10	3	2	5	17	16	11
Toluca	10	2	4	4	16	18	10
Tijuana	10	2	3	5	10	16	9
Atlas	10	3	0	7	10	17	9
Monterrey	10	0	5	5	10	17	5

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defence Force (C)	17	13	3	1	35	17	42
La Horquetta Rangers	17	11	2	4	48	18	35
Point Fortin	17	8	4	5	25	23	28
W Connection	16	8	3	5	28	20	27
Morvant Caledonia	17	6	6	5	20	23	24
Police	17	6	5	6	29	22	23
Club Sando	18	5	6	7	28	25	21
San Juan Jabloteh	17	5	4	8	21	31	19
Central	18	3	5	10	18	34	14
AC Port of Spain	17	3	4	10	18	38	13
Cunupia	17	2	6	9	14	33	12

SOUTH AMERICA

ARGENTINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors (C)	23	14	6	3	35	8	48
River Plate	23	14	5	4	41	18	47
Velez Sarsfield	23	11	6	6	27	14	39
Racing Club	23	9	12	2	28	23	39
Argentinos Juniors	23	10	9	4	22	17	39
Defensa y Justicia	23	10	6	7	26	18	36
Lanus	23	9	9	5	32	29	36
San Lorenzo	23	11	3	9	32	30	36
Rosario Central	23	9	9	5	31	29	36
Newell's Old Boys	23	9	8	6	33	25	35
Arsenal	23	9	7	7	37	32	34
Talleres	23	10	4	9	34	30	34
Estudiantes	23	8	6	9	23	22	30
Independiente	23	8	5	10	27	25	29
Atletico Tucuman	23	7	8	8	22	25	29
Union	23	7	6	10	21	30	27
Banfield	23	6	8	9	19	23	26
Central Cordoba	23	6	8	9	21	29	26
Gimnasia La Plata	23	6	5	12	22	23	23
Patronato	23	5	8	10	22	34	23
Huracan	23	5	7	11	17	27	22
Aldosivi	23	6	4	13	20	35	22
Colon	23	5	3	15	17	39	18
Godoy Cruz	23	6	0	17	22	46	18

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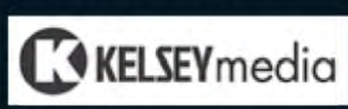

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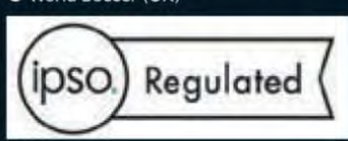

World Cup...the 2002 opening ceremony

SEOUL WORLD CUP STADIUM

Location: Seoul, South Korea
Team: FC Seoul, South Korea national team
Built: 2001
Capacity: 66,704

As its name suggests, South Korea's national stadium was built for the 2002 World Cup. Designed to look like a Korean kite, it played a significant role at the tournament, hosting the opening ceremony, the first match and the semi-finals, yet afterwards became the source of controversy.

With the Korea Football Association keen to make use of the impressive facility post-World Cup, they began searching for new tenants. Anyang Cheetahs, having left the capital in 1996 and changed their name from Lucky-Goldstar Hwangso, returned as Seoul FC, and became one of the country's most supported clubs – although also heavily disliked by rival fans.

Thanks to their stadium, they've had the K-League's highest average attendance for the last four years.

Seoul...view of the stadium

Upset...France v Senegal

Inside...the ground today

GREATEST GAMES

2002 May 31
France 0-1 Senegal

Seoul witnessed one of the great World Cup upsets when Papa Bouba Diop helped Senegal stun the defending champions. The ground also hosted South Korea, who only played there once during the tournament, when they were knocked out by Germany in the semi-finals.

2007 September 9
Spain U17s 0-0(P) Nigeria U17s

Nigeria won their third out of five U17 World Cups here, yet very few of the class of 2007 went on to great things. In terms of senior caps, their greatest success from this tournament was Victor Moses (who actually played for England during the tournament) while Golden Boot winner Macauley Christantus never played for his country again.

2013 October 26
FC Seoul 2-2 Guangzhou Evergrande

In their biggest game since relocating from Anyang, Seoul hosted the Chinese champions in the first leg of the Asian Champions League final. All-time top scorer Dejan Damjanovic made it 2-2 in the 83rd minute, yet a 1-1 draw in the second leg took the trophy to China on away goals.

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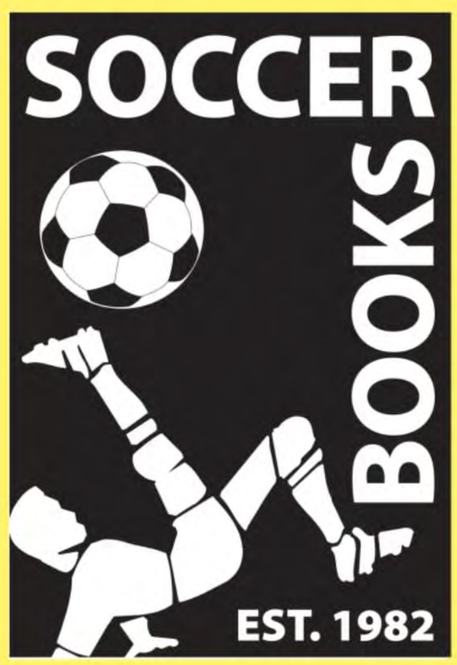

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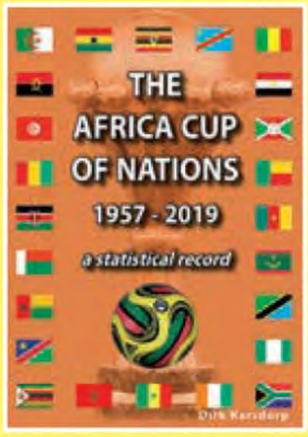
Softback Price £36.00 ***Postage Rate 'D'***



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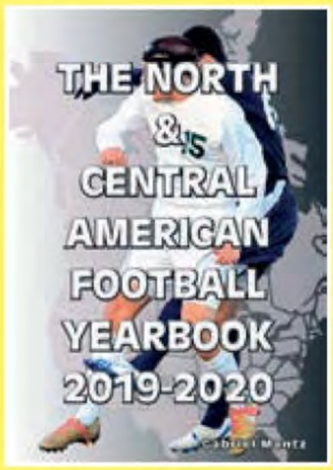

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